

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE 125TH 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 125TH NATIONAL CONVENTION OF
THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES,
HELD IN LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY: JULY 27-AUGUST 1, 2024,
PURSUANT TO 44 U.S.C. 1332; (PUBLIC LAW 90-620 (AS AMENDED
BY PUBLIC LAW 105-225, SEC. 3); (112 STAT. 1498)



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The proceedings of the national encampments of the United Spanish War Veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, the American Legion, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, the Veterans of World War I of the United States, Incorporated, the Disabled American Veterans, and the AMVETS (American Veterans of World War II), respectively, shall be printed annually, with accompanying illustrations, as separate House documents of the session of the Congress to which they may be submitted.
[Approved October 2, 1968.]

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI
April 2026

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 125th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in Louisville, Kentucky, July 27-August 1, 2024, which is submitted for printing as a House document.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dan West", with a stylized flourish 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	Lyall T. Beggs * Elected at St. Louis, Missouri.
1949-1950	Clyde A. Lewis* Elected at Miami, Florida.
1950-1951	Charles C. Ralls*Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1951-1952	Frank C. Hilton*Elected at New York, New York.
1952-1953	James W. Cothran* Elected at Los Angeles, California.
1953-1954	Wayne E. Richards* Elected at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
1954-1955	Merton B. Tice*Elected at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
1955-1956	Timothy J. Murphy* Elected at Boston, Massachusetts.
1956-1957	Cooper T. Holt*Elected at Dallas, Texas.
1957-1958	Richard L. Roudebush* Elected at Miami Beach, Florida.
1958-1959	John W. Mahan*Elected at New York, New York.
1959-1960	Louis G. Feldmann* Elected at Los Angeles, California.
1960-1961	T.C. Connell* Elected at Detroit, Michigan.
1961-1962	Robert E. Hansen* Elected at Miami Beach, Florida.
1962-1963	Byron B. Gentry* Elected at Minneapolis, Minnesota.
1963-1964	Joseph J. Lombardo* Elected at Seattle, Washington.
1964-1965	John A. Jenkins* Elected at Cleveland, Ohio.
1965-1966	Andy Borg*Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1966-1967	Leslie M. Fry*Elected at New York, New York.
1967-1968	Joseph A. Scerra*Elected at New Orleans, Louisiana.
1968-1969	Richard W. Homan* Elected at Detroit, Michigan.
1969-1970	Raymond A. Gallagher*Elected at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
1970-1971	Herbert R. Rainwater* Elected at Miami Beach, Florida.
1971-1972	Joseph L. Vicites*Elected at Dallas, Texas.
1972-1973	Patrick E. Carr* Elected at Minneapolis, Minnesota.
1973-1974	Ray R. Soden*Elected at New Orleans, Louisiana.

1974-1975	John J. Stang*Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1975-1976	Thomas C. Walker* Elected at Los Angeles, California.
1976-1977	R. D. Smith Jr.Elected at New York, New York.
1977-1978	Dr. John Wasyluk* Elected at Minneapolis, Minnesota.
1978-1979	Eric Sandstrom* Elected at Dallas, Texas.
1979-1980	Howard E. Vander Clute Jr.* .. Elected at New Orleans, Louisiana.
1980-1981	T. C. Selman*Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1980-1981	Arthur Fellwock*Succeeded T.C. Selman, Oct. 21, 1980.
1980-1981	Arthur Fellwock* Elected at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
1982-1983	James R. Currie* 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. RiversElected 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. LisickiElected 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.
2024-2025	Alfred “Al” Lipphardt.....	Elected at Louisville, Kentucky.

VFW NATIONAL OFFICERS 2023-2024

Commander-in-Chief.....	Duane Sarmiento
Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief.....	Alfred “Al” Lipphardt
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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Assistant Director.....	John Orzulak
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 Director, Properties-KC D'Marillio Holland
 Director, VFW Store Hank Ellis

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 Director, Communications & Public Affairs Robert Couture
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 Associate Director, DAMA NLS..... Vacant
 Associate Director, National Legislative Service Meggan Thomas
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 Deputy Director, National Veterans Service Christopher Macinkowicz
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 Associate Director, Field Operations Mark Barrett
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 Assistant Director, Compensation & Pension Policy..... Daniel Fletcher
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 Associate Director, Board of Veterans Appeals Jeffrey Wishneski
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 Manager, Administration & Support Operations..... Theresa Aldana

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Department of Connecticut	David Greene
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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
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Department of Rhode Island	Eric Dukat
Department of South Carolina	Edwin Tufts

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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

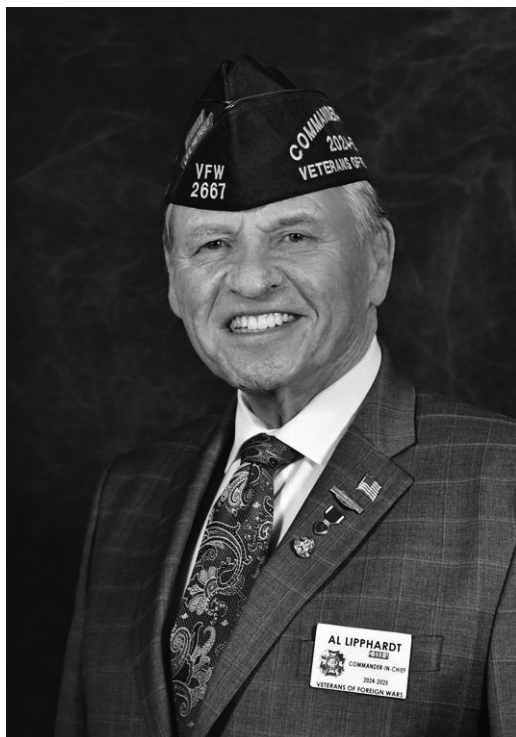
Joy Ausman	3979 MN
Sherrod N Conyers	2681 GA
Rene Fuertes	3104 MA
James Galen	6802-MI
Todd Hokanson	430 TX
Lora Land	9191 TX
George Lott	10152 NJ
Keith MacDonald	5867 CA

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS

Brian Willette	3104 MA
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Duane Sarmiento
Commander-in-Chief
2023-2024



Alfred "Al" Lipphardt
Commander-in-Chief
2024-2025

VFW NATIONAL OFFICERS 2024-2025

Commander-in-Chief..... Alfred "Al" Lipphardt
Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief..... Carol Whitmore
Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Timothy Peters
Judge Advocate General Joshua Schreck
Surgeon General James Tuorila
National Chaplain..... Peter Hook
National Chief of Staff..... Jeff Carroll
Inspector General Gregory Stafford

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Assistant Adjutant General Brian Walker
Quartermaster General..... Marc Garduno
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Deputy Director, Administrative Operations Vacant
Senior Director, Membership & Member Service Center David Prohaska
Deputy Director, Membership Corey Hunt
Assistant Director, Member Service Center..... John Orzulak
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Director, Properties-KC D'Marillio Holland
Director of Logistics Hank Ellis

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 Director, Operations Robert Jackson
 Director, Public Affairs & Strategic Outreach Robert Couture
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 Deputy Director, National Legislative Service..... Kristina Keenan
 Associate Director, Grassroots Advocacy NLS Joseph 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
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 Assistant Director, Field Operations Cindy Noel
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 Assistant Director, Veterans Health Policy Katherine Cassell
 Assistant Director, Operations & AdministrationBradley Hazell
 Assistant Director, Compensation & Pension Policy..... Daniel Fletcher
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Rene Fuertes		3104 MA
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Todd Hokanson		430 TX
Lora Land		9191 TX
George Lott		10152 NJ
Keith MacDonald		12098 AZ

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS

Brian Willette		3104 MA
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SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE
125TH NATIONAL CONVENTION OF THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY, JULY 27-AUGUST 1, 2024

ANNUAL MEMORIAL SERVICE
SUNDAY, JULY 28, 2024

(The Memorial Service of the 125th Annual Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in the Kentucky International Convention Center, Louisville, Kentucky, was called to order at 8:30 a.m., with Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento presiding.)

CALL TO ORDER

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: All rise.

Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the Gold Star families and VA National Chaplains to their seats of honor.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Yes, sir, Comrade Commander-in-Chief, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Please be seated.

There are times when mere words seem far from being adequate. This is such an occasion because we are gathered to recall those who never – who have made the supreme sacrifice, and to honor their families. Thus, our deeds speak better than words.

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

We feel that they have molded the future of our nation. They gave us strong incentive to carry on our crusade for lasting peace and a better purpose for 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 with us here today.

I now call upon VFW Auxiliary National President, Carla Martinez, to prepare the auxiliary altar.

VFW AUXILIARY DRAPING OF THE ALTAR
ADVANCEMENT OF COLORS
INVOCATION: VFW AUXILIARY NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DONNA MILLS
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE AND NATIONAL ANTHEM

NATIONAL AUXILIARY PRESIDENT MARTINEZ: The VFW national conductor and color bearers shall prepare the auxiliary altar with placement of the VFW Auxiliary memorial altar cloth and bible.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: 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: Yes, sir, Comrade Commander-in-Chief, sir. VFWs, Auxiliary, and guests, please rise. Captain of the VFW National Honor Guard, advance and post the colors, on your orders.

COLOR GUARD: On your command, sir. Honor Guard, post the colors.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Honor Guard, carry colors. Forward march. Present arms. Detail, halt. Present colors. Carry colors. Left wheel, march. Detail, halt. Order arms.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We will now have our invocation by VFW National Chaplain Donna Mills. Parade, rest.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: National sergeants, parade, rest.

CHAPLAIN MILLS: 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.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Amen.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Veterans of Foreign Wars and Auxiliary, atten-hut. Ladies and gentlemen, comrades, brothers and sisters, at this time, please join me for our Pledge of Allegiance, followed by the singing of our National Anthem by VFW national soloist, Willa Watts, and the posting of our nation's colors.

Present arms. I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.
(SINGING OF THE NATIONAL ANTHEM)

COLOR GUARD: Carry colors. Detail, halt. Post colors.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order, halt.

POW/MIA TRIBUTE
MEMORIAL ROLL CALL AND TRIBUTE
SYMBOLIC TRIBUTE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Please be seated. Comrades, members of VFW, Auxiliary, and friends, we meet at this time to commemorate our comrades of the United States Armed Forces who have answered the last call, and their families whose service and sacrifices too often goes without the recognition it deserves. The VFW ritual provides that the audience shall refrain from applauding.

The Sergeant-at-Arms will see that there is no disturbances during the ceremonies.

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

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I request that the VFW National chaplain preside.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: National sergeants, right face, forward, hut.

CHAPLAIN FREI: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am at your service and shall endeavor to perform this solemn duty with reverence in the spirit of faith, hope, and charity. We will now have the lighting of the POW/MIA candle, the Armed Forces vigil candle by the Commander-in-Chief, and the VFW Auxiliary national president.

Oh God, almighty creator and ruler of the universe, some of our comrades and companions are prisoners of war and missing in action. Comfort them, we pray, in their isolation from their 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 of the armed forces of the United States of America. On the day of battle, may they be courageous and strong, resourceful and capable, resolute and victorious.

In the time of peace, may they serve with dignity and honor as effective emissaries of goodwill for this nation. May their devotion and loyalty to you and to their homeland inspire them in moments of challenge and comfort them in tribulation and long separations from loved ones.

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

Amen.

This year, our memorial roll call recognizes recently departed past president Patricia Jankowski, who passed away on March 3rd, 2024. Patricia Jankowski was national president from 2000 to 2001. Patricia is being represented by past national president, Evelyn McCune.

We will now prepare 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 SARMIENTO: We can keep their memories bright and strong. We can remember their service to their country and their service to their fellow comrades and family members.

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

NATIONAL AUXILIARY PRESIDENT MARTINEZ: Every life has a beginning and so -- 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.

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

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

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

NATIONAL SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT BRYANT: 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.

CHAPLAIN FREI: 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 WHITMORE: We can continue to serve our fellow veterans, their families, our communities. We must always honor the dead by helping the living.

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

NATIONAL JUNIOR VICE PRESIDENT CALLAHAN: 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.

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

CHAPLAIN MILLS: 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.

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

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

Let us pray.

God, grant to the living, grace. To the departed, rest. To the nation, peace and unity. To us, your servants, the promise of everlasting life, light to guide the way, courage to support us, and your blessings to unite us in service to you, our God, and this, our country. Amen.

The Thoroughbreds will now perform Nearer My God to Thee.

(SINGING OF NEARER MY GOD TO THEE)

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

I place upon our sacred shrine these red flowers, which symbolizes the zeal of our departed comrades in upholding brotherhood, truth, and justice. Comrade Past Commander-in-Chief, what tribute have you to offer?

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

CHAPLAIN FREI: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, have you a tribute to offer upon this sacred shrine?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: The blue of our national standard symbolizes truth and fidelity.

Therefore, I place these blue flowers from nature's bosom, in token of our sincere respect for all departed comrades.

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

NATIONAL AUXILIARY PRESIDENT MARTINEZ: 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, and on sea, and in the air, are immortalized in the hearts of a grateful people.

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

The 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 those to family members gone before us?

NATIONAL AUXILIARY PRESIDENT MARTINEZ: These white flowers we bring as a token of the love that we have for our departed brothers and sisters, and those white orchids we bring as a token of remembrance for our departed past national presidents.

(SINGING OF FOLLOW THE FLAG)

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

MEMORIAL ADDRESS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: It is now my distinct pleasure to introduce our speaker, Chaplain Colonel J. Roger Dill, United States Army retired and life member of VFW Post 3205, Department of Kentucky.

CHAPLAIN COLONEL DILL: Dear people, those who came to support the program from other places, and those of you who are members or support members of the people who have served their nation around this world, everything we do we do for veterans, is the mission statement. And I know that a lot of you work at that every day.

This opening session reminds us that we value those who have served, but are no longer with us in this life. We remember and honor those we have lost. I'm honored to have been asked to deliver this part of the service of honoring and remembering. Before I go any farther however, I want to introduce my two favorite veterans.

Navy -- sorry, my grandfather, World War I, in the Navy.

My father, World War II, Army. The stole I wear is my uniform where I still conduct military funerals. The stole is from a World War II chaplain's kit and on this stole are, indeed, the people that I honor first and foremost in my life, who are veterans.

But I also want to brag on the state of Kentucky, my state, which has established many veteran cemeteries across the state over the years, going back to the Civil War and maybe further. Those things are there to remind us that we remember the fallen at whatever time it may have happened.

And to name a couple of others, the Vietnam sundial in Frankfort is absolutely breathtaking.

In Elizabethtown, Kentucky, there is an 80 percent replica of the wall in Washington, D.C. The Elizabethtown National Guard unit lost many of its sons in Vietnam due to a surprise, aren't they all, heavy night attack. In Louisville, where we are now, they have a large memorial vault for those Kentuckians killed in the line of duty, non-combat.

But let me get back to where we are today.

I cherished my time in the National Guard. I related to my ministry in uniform more strongly than I do my time in church pastoral roles. However, both involve getting to know people at the very deep level, and certainly, great and sad memories exist in both of those arenas.

I have been there for people, as many of you have, in joy and in sorrow, in the best of times and in the worst of times. But I have to tell you, what broke my heart was one of my duties.

We call them next-of-kin notifications.

Every Gold Star family member here has their own story, and Captain -- Chaplain Grets (phonetic), who's done the local -- some local work here for this, and myself, are part of some of your stories because we did those notices at your house, or where we found you.

I have lots of stories, and I'm sure Dr. Chaplain Graetz does as well, for our many years of wearing the cross. I have chosen three of those stories to highlight what it means to remember and to honor. The first story comes out of Landstuhl Hospital in Germany.

Every morning, Monday through Thursday, the commander's call was the first order of the day for senior staff from every department. Once we were told to take our seats, the first word out of the chief-of-staff's mouth is chaplain.

Once or twice a week, that was me, I was to deliver a short thought for the day and a brief prayer for staff and patients. One day I began my quote -- well, I began my talk with this quote, greater love has no one but that they lay down their life for another. The hospital commander immediately said, that's John 15:13. Everybody turned and looked at him. The hospital commander is Jewish, but in reacting to our reaction, he said, don't you know all of us Jews know the New Testament by heart.

What he did at that time was lighten the moment, for the moment that was soon to follow was his first on the agenda once he begins, and that is to announce that we have casualties and injuries coming in to the hospital that day, and that wasn't unusual.

Once the briefing was finished, we stood in place as the commander departed, and he always stopped at the door and left us with some quip, a quote of some kind, to speak to us directly as a -- as staff. And what he said on this particular day is, make sure your people take care of themselves so they can best take care of our warriors.

Those who worked and still work in military hospitals were and are frontline warriors of the highest order because they are in that conflict almost every day when the -- they are -- kept bringing in casualties.

As one of the hospital chaplains, I talked to hundreds of servicemen and women, saw many battle scars, and perceived that some of those scars that you couldn't see would be -- last a lifetime, etched deep into their soul. I am certain that some, maybe many of you, have some of those scars.

And certainly, some of you have lost loved ones. I tell my families that have lost soldiers, cry. Tears wash the windows of the heart. Sadness is a loss -- is -- is very human.

Thus, our context today, memories matter.

If you find yourself in the company of a family member who has lost a loved one, no matter how long ago or how recent, do not avoid saying the name of that one that they are grieving. That name is always on the very front edge of their heart and their mind. And that memory will never be lost.

Story two, grief is a powerful event for the heart. One of my brigade commanders asked me to visit his wife in the hospital where she had a heart condition. After the duty day, I went to the hospital and the general was already there. I didn't talk to him. I sat down -- pulled the chair over and sat down and talked to his wife and had prayer with her before I left.

The next day, the general saw me down the hallway and said, Chaplain.

Naturally, I went to -- to the general to see what I needed to be doing. And he said very quickly, Chaplain, you will have my funeral. Yes, sir. If I outlive you, I will.

But be sure someone is briefed in to give me the call. He turned and went to his office, nothing else said. Several years later, and two years after I had retired, I got that call. One of his son -- when I got to the funeral, one of his sons briefed me as to how the general had died.

The son's mother, the general's wife, was in the hospital and the doctor had called the general out of her room to -- to tell him something. He called him over away from the room so nobody would hear, but he did not talk loud to start with.

But according to what I -- my information, but the doctor said, I -- my belief is, your wife has your heart -- her -- her heart will only last about three more days, and the doctor walks away.

The general died the next day.

The general died the next day.

Now, I was called to do the service. I was prepared for the service, I thought. I had my things listed to honor what this first lieutenant Vietnam combat veteran had been through, and some of the more recent notable leadership memories I was going to share.

However, seven grandkids and two general officers shared most of everything I had on my list. So I shared a few comments with many of the soldiers who were there, who had served with him, some from Vietnam, and who had served under him and years later.

But then, I turned to the family and in -- which included his wife, who had been brought to the service in an ambulance. And I said, you know, you know his achievements as a soldier. You hear it all the time from all the way -- and every time he gets to speak, he gets introduced with all those things.

But -- and you also know how tight you are as a family because he insists that you guys come in every so often, and you all do family things together. But Peggy, his wife, I looked straight at her and I said, Peggy, the doctor told you what he told him.

But when he told him, his emotional heart and his physical heart could not live -- bear living without you. Total silence. The general's Michigan State football player, 240-pound son, not the one who briefed me, his son broke the silence by blurting out for all to hear, you know, that is so right.

Again, silence. I could not think of a better closing comment, so I had the benediction and we went to the graveside service. I strongly suspect -- oh, Peggy outlived him three years.

I strongly suspect that those memories are still being relived by all -- that -- at his family's gatherings even today. Many of you have family and friends that have gone on from this world that live on in your hearts.

Remembering and honoring is always important. But then, there was Charlie Mike.

Following my retirement from Fort Knox, I moved to Hatteras Island, North Carolina, and took a church. Being a retired military chaplain, I conducted many funerals there, mostly Navy and Coast Guard.

After all, we were on an island. And I had one enlisted Air Force senior enlisted person at her funeral. And I had the funeral of one very decorated first sergeant, who got a field promotion to captain and took over as company commander in Vietnam.

But back to Charlie Mike. It is the third story. I don't remember his name anymore, and did not use it back when I did remember. For he was a Vietnam veteran who suffered from PTSD, and we became close friends.

I was someone he could talk to because I somewhat understood, and I dealt with some PTSD patients in my work as a chaplain. But his patients that had worked with him were people his age and his experiences with a few people from the current one had gotten in with that group.

The only thing I think he ever learned from me was a line I always used in PTSD was, you can never unsee what you have seen, but you can learn to lessen the pain over time.

When we would meet, we would talk -- he would talk and I would listen. That's what needed to happen. When we would depart from one of our meetings, my parting comment was, Charlie Mike, and he -- the first time I called him that, he turned around and smiled and saluted me.

If you are not familiar with what that means, it is military radio talk for, continue the mission, and that is what he was doing. He trusted me with his pain, with his calling, to help fellow the veterans who had shared in his path, that path of aloneness and being forgotten.

Sadly, I lost contact when I left the island. People at the church did not know the depth of our old soldier conversations. Thus, no one called me regarding his death. Had I known, I would have gone back and would have asked to take part of -- at his funeral, Charlie Mike.

Charlie Mike is one of my forever memories. Sorry, it's time to close, and I close with what I might call a free verse poem or a prayer. I wrote it for my first military funeral in 1975. I still use it for all non-combat warrior funerals of any branch. Based on Matthew 5:9, it says, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God."

For a veteran to die far from shots fired in anger, makes him or her no less the warrior. For a veteran to

die in the winter of his or her life does not diminish his or her call to duty. To be a peacemaker, that veteran had to offer himself or herself to stand in the midst of conflict. And for a veteran to die far from shots fired in anger with a heart at peace makes himself or her no less the victor, amen.

Oh, and Charlie Mike.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you, Roger.

VFW Auxiliary National Soloist, Willa Watts, will now perform It Is Well With My Soul.

(SINGING OF IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL)

CHAPLAIN FREI: Please stand for the benediction by past VFW National Chaplain Debra Halter, followed by the playing of taps by Will Lovan, associated track bugler for Churchill Downs and Keeneland.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Honor Guard, halt. Right face. Parade rest.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN HALTER: Almighty God, as we conclude our annual memorial service, we are reminded that you, Lord, are God, creator, and giver of life. You have blessed all present here today with life, and we are grateful for each day that 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 the freedom of our own land in the world. The fallen, whether in air, or on land, or sea, have provided all that we appreciate today.

May we continue to remember our comrades with grateful hearts, full of thanksgiving for the opportunity to have known them. For them and their families, we pray for strength and for courage. And in the silence of this moment, we dedicate ourselves anew to our God and to our country. Amen.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Amen.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary, atten-hut.

Comrade Bugler, prepare to sound taps.

Present arms. Order halt.

Ladies and gentlemen, please remain at your seats as our guests of honor retire from the hall.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, please close the ceremonies of this memorial service of the 125th National Convention.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you, Sergeant-At-Arms.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you -- thank you, sir, national sergeants.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: This concludes our memorial service.

I would like to acknowledge and thank all of you for your respectful participation in this solemn service.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Right face. Forward march.

(SERVICE CONCLUDED AT 9:28 A.M. ET)

BUSINESS SESSION
MONDAY, JULY 29, 2024

(The Business Session of the 125th national Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and the 111th National Convention of the VFW Auxiliary, held in the Louisville International Convention Center, Louisville, Kentucky, was called to order on Monday, July 29, 2024, 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 war veterans, comrades of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, patriots of the Auxiliary, our distinguished guests and citizens of our great nation.

My name is Dan West. I currently serve as the Adjutant General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and I would like to welcome you to the 125th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars here in Louisville, Kentucky.

As we get underway this morning, please direct your attention to the large screens as this year's convention sponsors are displayed.

Our sincere thanks goes to each of them for their support of our convention. With special appreciation to USAA, Humana, T-Mobile, Phillips, and to CaptionCall via Sorenson Interpretive Services as the provider of this year's closed caption. Please give them all a round of applause for – for their generous contributions.

I do have a few brief announcements this morning. If you've not yet done so already, please download the VFW Events app at the App Store or on Google Play. It has everything you need to know about our convention and will keep you up to date on any changes.

I also want to remind everyone that the speakers you'll hear from today and in the days to follow are our invited guests. Please conduct yourselves accordingly as upstanding members of our great organization.

With that, however, you have fought for your first amendment rights, and we've got a lot of politicians here this week.

Nothing? Really?

Who may need to hear how you feel about certain things they say, but let's keep it PG, because this is a family show and it is being live streamed. So, no streaking, blasphemous comments, finger gestures or obscene pictures.

Thank you.

I'd like a moment to recognize a few by name and ask them to stand.

Joining us from the Military Order of the Purple Heart, is the immediate past National Commander and life member of VFW Post 8245, Carder Ferguson.

The National Commander and life member of VFW Post 7511, Robert Olivarez.

The National Senior Vice Commander and life member of VFW Post 12209, Tracy Brown Greene.

We also have with us the Military Order of the Purple Heart, VFW liaison and Junior Vice Commander of the Department of Washington, Drew James.

With us today is also the Kentucky Director of Veterans Affairs, Whitney Allen.

Thank you for being here.

Now, before we bring up the 125 National Convention Chairman Carl Kaelin to get our convention underway, some of you may know they hold a very cute, little annual race here in Louisville each year called the Kentucky Derby.

So, we could think of only one way to kick this convention off right. And for those of you unfamiliar with the race, no doubt this bit is still familiar to you. Here, with the call to the post, please welcome Associate Track Bugler for Keeneland and Churchill Downs, Mr. Will Lovan.
(Bugler plays)

REMAKS: CARL KAE LIN CONVENTION CHAIRMAN

CHAIRMAN KAE LIN: Good morning, VFW, VFW Auxiliary members and special guests. Welcome to my home state, the great state of Kentucky.

Our convention serves to reinforce our commitment to America's veterans and military families and to 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 advance of the colors.

ADVANCEMENT OF COLORS: VFW NATIONAL HONOR GUARD

INVOCATION: NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DAVID FREI

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE AND NATIONAL ANTHEM

CHAIRMAN KAE LIN: National Sergeant, you will now prepare the room to advance the colors.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Captain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Honor Guard, advance and post the colors on your orders.

HONOR GUARD: On your command sir.

(Sergeant-at-Arms gives proper commands to advance the colors)

CHAIRMAN KAE LIN: For this morning's invocation, we will have the National Chaplain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, David Frei. Please remain standing as we recite the Pledge of Allegiance led by Sergeant at Arms, the national anthem sung by a life member of Post 6469 and the VFW Department of New York District 13 Senior Vice Commander Brianna Felice and for the posting of colors.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Uncover. Parade rest.

CHAPLAIN DAVID FREI: Oh, 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. We are honored, Lord, to be able to visit and work with each other through this grand opening.

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

We ask for blessings on those who are currently serving our country throughout the world. May their families be blessed with their safe return. Amen.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Veterans of Foreign Wars and Auxiliary, atten-hut. Cover.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Comrades, brothers, and sisters honoring the flag of our nation, please join me in our Pledge of Allegiance.

(Pledge of Allegiance was recited)

(National Anthem was performed by Brianna Felice)

(Posting of Colors)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Comrade Chairman that completes the opening ceremonies of the 125th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, sir.

CHAIRMAN KAE LIN: Thank you, Sergeant.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you, sir.

SERGEAT-AT-ARMS: National Sergeant, right face. Forward, hut.

CHAIRMAN KAE LIN: You may be seated. Now please dim the lights for a special presentation.

(Video presentation)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Comrades and Patriots, I would like to take a little time here. Why don't we give Brianna a round of applause for that awesome rendition of our National Anthem.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS OF COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF DUANE SARMIENTO
PRESENTATION OF OFFICIAL BADGE, BELL, GAVEL, AND RING

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: It is now my honor to introduce to you this morning, a comrade who has served our great country for nearly four decades, a U.S. Navy veteran. He has filled elected and appointed positions at all levels in the VFW.

Duane Sarmiento was elected VFW Commander-in-Chief on July 27, 2023, at our 124th National Convening -- Convention in Phoenix, Arizona.

He served in the Navy from 1988 to 1997, and his Naval Reserve from 2002 to 2006. He has been a member of the VFW for 34 years earning his VFW Eligibility and Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

As chief, he has worked diligently over the last year to build a stronger, more united community of veterans worldwide, ready to "Meet the Challenge," any challenge, with unwavering resolve and no doubt he has succeeded in his mission as evident by the video we just watched.

With the following titles bestowed upon him during the last three years in his national chairs, please welcome to the stage His Excellency, the Commander-in-Chief of the Whole Wide World, the Supreme Overwatch of the Military Order of the Cootie, a Kentucky colonel, and chief of the Eboyloy (phonetic) tribe, the Guardian of the Bells of Balangiga, Chairman Emeritus of the GRO Committee, chief librarian of any city he's visited, an Arkansas traveler, a Nana Plaza executive, and Master of Minions, the gatekeeper to the land of the big PX, the deputy sheriff of Soy Cowboy, Overwatch of the Panama Canal, senior escort for airplane boarding, and a true national treasure, VFW Commander-in-Chief, Duane Sarmiento.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Whoo! Whoo!

CHIEF SARMEINTO: Good morning! Welcome to our 125th National Convention. I want to start this morning by thanking my fellow VFW and auxiliary members, distinguished guests, supporters, and friends for being here today.

I truly achieved the Eboyloy tribe. That's what I -- they sacrificed a pig and two chickens.

Here's with immense gratitude and admiration that I stand before you. It's hard to believe a year has passed since I last took this stage and was sworn in as commander-in-chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the greatest veteran service organization in the world.

I remain humbled by the grateful -- for the trust -- and grateful for the trust you placed in me. And please know I spent each and every day of my tenure in our highest office working to perpetuate the trust by leading from the front and meeting every challenge to ensure the needs of our veterans, service members, and their families are met.

Not just here at home, but around the world. But of course I couldn't have done this alone. It's because of your extraordinary hard work, countless hours you have invested, an unwavering commitment and dedication to our mission that, together, we met the challenge.

I hope that you are more proud today that you are affiliated with the VFW than ever before. I know I am. Unfortunately -- well, it's we. I only have four days. Is it four days out?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 1: Two and a half.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Two and a -- we have -- I have two and a half days left of our convention.

I can't thank each and every one of you individually, but I would like to recognize a few of you by name. Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt, Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore, what a great ride.

Thank you for allowing me to be a part of this dynamic team. You know, we all have mentors.

Past National Commanders Lisicki, Wallace, Spera, Schmidt, Lawrence, Roesch, and Borland, thank you for sharing your knowledge and not just for nudging me in the right direct direction, but at times shoving me in the right direction.

To the Eastern Conference, the Department of New Jersey, New Jersey's District 13, Anthony T.

Calista of Post 5579, thank you for your continued support and friendship.

To the department commanders of the '23-'24 year, thank you for leading your departments this year. Thank you for allowing me to be what I -- what do I tell them? I'm the bus driver is all I am. I drive the bus. Everybody out here does the work. And thank you for all that.

To my family, Alexis, Gabrielle, Michael, my grandson Jack-Jack, Brett, and especially my wife Ella. Thank you for the motivation you've given me and for your patience and understanding. It's been an absolute honor to lead the VFW and the experience I will forever cherish.

Think back of all the good we've accomplished this year, even just a few highlights from the videos we watched moments ago: VFW accredited service officers are now outputting \$13 billion, that's with a B, in the hands of veterans each year. Billions. How many zeroes are in a billion?

But I know one thing, when I play Mega Powerball, it's more than that. Surpassed 13 million in scholarship to students' veterans. We took our day of service to 524 communities worldwide, showing nearly ten million people through news coverage and social media, we are still serving. We launched Combat Tested Gaming, reaching droves of young veterans. We pushed Congress hard for expanded survivor benefits.

And arguably, most importantly, we waged and continue to lead the war against claim sharks and their siphoning of veterans benefits. Let me be clear. This is an issue we must continue to hammer from the halls of Congress to our state and local municipalities until every American veteran and those future generations are protected from these predators' shady tactics, and disgusting and illegal operations. We're going to -- we're going to pass this goddamn thing.

Where's Reverend Hook? Sorry, Reverend Hook.

I know. That ain't happening.

While we continue to press Congress for national protections, seven states have passed claim shark legislation, with two more soon to join in. Yo, we got to keep fighting them. Keep fighting them.

They're throwing so much damn money at this. I know it's hard, but we won't stop. We won't stop. Comrades and auxiliary members, keep up the fight. We will meet this challenge. We will emerge victorious.

We will -- we -- this belongs to America's veterans.

Beyond our tangible achievements this year, the figures and the signed dotted lines. I want to also acknowledge the worldwide spirit of collaboration and a sense of community we've established this year. Often it seems our world is divided geographically, culturally, ideology.

See, I got one of them words again, ideology. How the hell you say the damn thing? Ideology. But you know what I'm saying. We'll just skip it. But you know what I'm saying.

Boundaries, but the comradery we share and our commitment to service unites us in a common pursuit that knows no boundaries. Our mission reads the foster comradery amongst United States veterans of overseas conflicts to serve our veterans, the military, and our communities and to advocate on behalf of all veterans.

Nowhere does it state, "Well, we only do that for those stateside." Our deployed service members need us. And how can we best advocate for them if we allow -- if we allow oceans to act as barriers preventing us from immersing ourselves into the daily lives and hearing their challenges and successes firsthand?

Our overseas veterans and their families need us. Their access to care and support is inconsistent at best. How can we ensure their needs are being met if we allow -- Christ, got the word again. Cultural ideologies. There you go.

Cultural ideologies and physical distance to create psychological distance. We can't. Out of sight out of mind doesn't hold up. We'll fix this bullshit FMP VA program.

And I got great news for the overseas guys. We have positive news. For three years we talked about FMP, right? We're going to do it. Now we know it's a congressional fix. We need a law.

Thursday, Congressman Van Drew out of the department at State of New Jersey dropped H.R.9177, addressing our needs as a bill to get passed to fix FMP, a priority goal for the VFW.

Now, is it -- is it going to get passed this year? This Congress ends the -- end of -- the end of '24, but we -- but we are assured it's going to be reintroduced and we're going to continue this fight. This is exactly why I took the VFW around the world this year.

We met with NATO, Air Force senior leaders to E-1 at SHAPE Airfield in Belgium, and service members across several installations and major commands in Germany. We visited Marines on rotation in Darwin, Australia, military leaders and troops in Korea. And we traveled to the Navy in Yokosuka, Japan, where I met with leaders including Vice Admiral Katcher and boarded the USS Dewey to learn more about the quality of life directly from its sailors.

In spite of this -- glad you like it. Despite what we thought we knew, the VFW delegation and I gained valuable insight to the needs of America's military, directly from America's military.

No other service organization has the degree of firsthand knowledge that we hold. And this is knowledge that will propel our advocacy efforts for years to come. We can talk the talk because we've been walking the walk, leading from the front.

In fact, this brings me to another highlight for the VFW this year, that we've not announced until now. One that truly serves as a testament to the work we put in. It's a direct result of walking the walk. While some replace boots on the -- boots-on-the-ground approach with advocacy ads, talking about what they do. Others resorted to being keyboard warriors, just typing along saying whatever the hell they want. We've been out there doing it and people have taken notice.

They want to be a part of this thing of ours. I'm pleased to report this year that, because of all of you, first time in over 32 years, the VFW has shown growth in membership for two years in a row. That's -- 32 years it's been, and let me tell you something. We ain't stopping.

I know, as sure as shit stinks, we're going to get over again with Al Lipphardt and we're going to get over again with Carol Whitmore. And I'm from Jersey, man. That's how we talk. This increase doesn't just mean that people are taking notice of the great work of organization. It means the doors of Congress, the White House, the Pentagon, the statehouses around the country will remain open to veterans.

It means those who want to continue serving during or after their time in service know where to come. It means we're expanding and better positioned to take our resources to the veteran community around the world, building upon a worldwide community and rectifying the lack of support of our overseas veterans are too often subject to.

We instituted 12 new posts this year, three of them overseas. Post 12224 in Palawan, Philippines. Post 12231 in Metro Manila, Philippines. Post 1225 in Guantanamo Bay Naval base in Cuba. A place for veterans. We're bringing the strength of the VFW and its resources directly to those who need us most.

While we have much to celebrate, our work is never done. Success is a continuous journey, not a destination. And our journey continues this week through convention.

We'll conduct the business of the organization and decisions that need to be made to guide us into another year and beyond.

Again, I thank all of you for your support and commitment to the VFW. It has been an absolute honor and a true privilege to serve as your Commander-in-Chief of the greatest veterans service organization in the world, the organization where no one does more for veterans.

Now let's have a great convention. Woo.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: One more time for our greatest Commander-in-Chief with 50 million titles, Duane Sarmiento.

As our tradition prescribes, commander-in-chief at this convention is presented with his convention name badge, a bell. I don't know what -- he's a Navy guy, so he'll do something with the bell, and a gavel by Carl Kaelin.

And this year, we also have introduced a special Commander-in-Chief ring that will be presented as well. Please welcome back to the podium our Commander-in-Chief.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: VFW GOLD MEDAL OF MERIT AND CITATION TO
CARLA MARTINEZ, PRESIDENT OF THE VFW AUXILIARY

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: It is now my distinct pleasure to introduce my esteemed counterpart, the National President of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary.

Carla Martinez joined the Auxiliary in 1982 on the eligibility of her father, Harry Creel, who served in the United States Air Force for 23 years, who she credits for inspiring her Auxiliary journey.

Carla brings an unprecedented facet to her role as Auxiliary's first ever dual member to hold the position of National President. She is a Life member of Lieutenant Clarence E. Allen Auxiliary Post 409 in Salt Lake City, Utah, and is also a VFW Gold Legacy Life member, having retired from the United States Navy and earning her eligibility through service in Korea.

Carla and her husband Stanley have a son, daughter-in-law, and four grandchildren. And in her spare time, she likes to volunteer at the VA Hospital, recruit and mentor. She has served the Auxiliary in many capacities, including Auxiliary District and Department President, Department Chief of Staff, National Certified Recruiter/Trainer for the State of Utah, and as the National Western Conference Chairman for Scholarships Program.

Carla is a lifetime member of the Military Order of the Cooties and a lifetime member of the Fleet Reserve Association. There is no doubt her leadership, especially over the last year as National President. She has led another incredible year for the Auxiliary.

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

PRESIDENT MARTINEZ: Okay. Can everybody see me? I'm sure you can because I came out and tested it.

Commander-in-Chief Sarmiento, National VFW and VFW Auxiliary officers, past commanders-in-chief, past National Presidents, comrades, brothers, sisters, and guests.

This medallion is a gift that I will be able to look at and treasure every day, as it represents the 470,000-plus Auxiliary members and the VFW members -- the VFW members that worked alongside of each other during the 2023-2024 "Meet the Challenge" while banding together for our veterans year.

We have all accomplished so much, and with continuing teamwork from our future leaders, we will do even more. I am so proud of everyone as they stepped up for the common goal that we all have, and that is to support our veterans, families, and communities.

The auxiliary stood by the VFW during Chief Sarmiento's testimony on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento and all of the VFW comrades, thank you for everything you do, for your sacrifices, for advocating for our veterans besides yourself. As a fellow comrade, I am so proud to belong to the greatest veterans organization and auxiliary in the world, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary.

It is truly all about veterans helping veterans, along with unwavering support for uncommon heroes. I have had the opportunity to do things with Chief Sarmiento that I would not have thought about. Thank you so much for including the VFW Auxiliary to do these things.

It is so exciting that we are now back in our VA facilities and able to spend more time with our veterans, and dedicate and deserve our attention that they need. We can play bingo, we can read, we can do popcorn, and we can make blankets, and just be there for them.

Watching a veteran come home after they went on an honor flight is breathtaking. Honored and humbled are a few words to describe how I feel about accepting this medallion, which belongs to each and every Auxiliary member and veteran here today.

Thank you, everyone, who I have met along my journey this year and for sharing your stories with me. I feel so privileged to be standing in your presence and will treasure your friendship always. Thank you so much to the Veterans of Foreign Wars for this prestigious award.

May God bless you all and keep you all safe while continuing to defend our country around the world. And God bless the United States of America.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Commander-in-Chief Gold Medal of Merit and Citation awarded to Carla Martinez, National President, Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary 2023, 2024. 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, "Banding Together for Our Veterans," reflects her vision and unwavering support for our nation's service members, veterans, and their families, and will forever serve as the true and honorable legacy of her presidency.

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

In witness whereof, we have here unto set our hands in the official seal of the veterans of the United States this 29th day of July 2024, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief and Dan West, Adjutant General.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: JAKE RADEMACHER, PRESIDENT, PERSERVANCE PRODUCTIONS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I had the pleasure of meeting our next guest at a California VFW convention reception last month. He gave a captivating presentation and I knew I had to invite him here to our convention to share his work with you.

Jake Rademacher is a filmmaker with strong ties to the military. Most of you know his work. His first documentary entitled "Brothers At War" was a result of his embedding with four different units in Iraq, to include that of his brothers.

He was able to bring the real-life bonds formed through service and experience from the front lines to the big screen. Today his work continues. What happens after war? What really happens afterward?

Rademacher has reconnected with those he embedded with 15 years ago to show America just that with his latest documentary, "Brothers At War." I'm so glad he could join us today. Please give a warm VFW welcome to Mr. Jake Rademacher.

MR. RADEMACHER: How you guys doing today? Awesome. Everybody had a little coffee, I can see. Good. I'm a military family member and I'm a filmmaker. My brothers came home from Fallujah angry, distant, different. They told me the truth wasn't coming home from Iraq.

I was a family member whose grandson [sic] fought in World War II and flew over Europe and then spent the last six months fighting with the Italian partisans overseas.

As someone who wanted to serve himself, but bad eyesight kept me out of the service, and as a brother whose blood was fighting overseas, this pissed me off. So I decided to do something about it.

I took all the money I ever made, started a production company, got together a small camera crew, and went to Iraq and joined my brother on his third deployment to Mosul. What I saw there was amazing.

I saw a marine would get a bag of M&Ms from home and share it with his entire squad. I saw men run towards gunfire, sneak into high sites in the middle of the night. I witnessed fear you could taste, saw incredible bravery, witnessed utter sadness, what war can do to a leg, to a jaw. Saw a coffin, a flag draped over it, and the respect his comrades paid.

All of this became "Brothers At War."

A marine hooked me up with Gary Sinise. He saw the film and he started telling me what to do all the time, so we decided to make it official. He became executive producer of the film.

We wanted that film to be seen by veterans and their families first. So we took it to places like Fayetteville, North Carolina and Jacksonville, North Carolina and Columbus, Georgia. And these became celebrations of your service and my family's service.

After the film, service members and their families would come up to us and say, "We just had our first conversation about his or her experience overseas." Oh man, this is important. Can we take this a

step further?

I created a journal to go alongside the film. I brought it to Gary Sinise. He said, okay, let's see how it works. He put me on a five-base military tour. Next thing I know, I'm working with 700 vets coming home from Iraq, and they're journaling and we're having a conversation.

We've now done that workshop over the last 13 years for 40,000 service members and their families. I was at Camp Pendleton last week working with veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. We will be at an Air Force base in Kansas next weekend.

After years of working with veterans, I came to Gary and I said, "Look, I'm becoming curious about my friends from the war, how they're really doing. I want to make a film where we follow-up with them and see what it's like to be a veteran. I want to flash from the war zone to 15 years later to see the veteran they become.

Gary said, "Okay. Let's do it." So in 2019, I began a four-year journey to four continents to follow-up with 12 war fighters that I had met overseas. My own two brothers, who at this point had deployed 17 times, and ten friends I met in a war zone.

Would you guys like to see that movie trailer?

All right.

Here's the movie trailer for "Brothers After War."

(VIDEO PLAYED)

(APPLAUSE)

MR. RADEMACHER: I was going to ask you if you like the trailer. I guess that's my response, huh? You know what? This is your story. This is the story of 12 veterans of foreign wars.

The Gary Sinise Foundation said, "We'll fund your film on one condition. We want you to create a new seminar, this one for veterans." I said, "Deal."

So February 1st, earlier this year, we took it up to Fairbanks, Alaska. It's 40 degrees below zero outside at 8:00 in the morning. It's still dark and 60 veterans came to see the film and take part in this new seminar.

After the film, during the seminar, seven veterans shared about being suicidal at some point in their life, to include one right then and there. Regal Cinemas saw the response from the veterans and how they stayed in the theater for two hours after the film and the seminar were over. They were like, you guys got to go. And they said, come to headquarters.

I screened the film for them right before Memorial Day. They saw the film, they support our veterans, they support the Gary Sinise Foundation. And they said, "We're in. We love this film."

Now, here's the problem. I don't have the marketing budget of a James Bond film or a Marvel film. This is a documentary funded by a charity, but wherever there are groups of veterans who want this film to come to their community, Regal Cinemas and myself and Gary Sinise, we will get you the film. We intend to release this movie in movie theaters across America in early 2025.

Now, this cause is very personal to me. In the course of making the film, my brother Joe, for the first time, to anyone, revealed to me that he was half a pound of pressure away from taking his own life.

So based on his generous sharing of that in the -- in the course of the film, you see that it's kind of organically woven into that. You know, I want to get this film out to as many veterans and as many military and veteran family members as possible.

One thing we've learned is that if you start to communicate, if you start to talk about your experiences, if you're able to tell your story, that's how real healing starts. And we found that movies make tough subjects easier to talk about.

We lost 6,700 killed in action in the last 20 years. We lost 120,000 to suicide.

My hope is that you will join me in this movement to get the film out and to help our veterans have a conversation and feel camaraderie and feel community.

One veteran who saw this film, deployed three times, said to me, "It made me feel like I wasn't alone, that I wasn't broken, that it's okay to be vulnerable. It gave me hope for my future."

So I'd like to get that experience to as many veterans as possible, and the folks in California have already reached out to us to say, yes, we're going to help you bring it to our communities. The website is up there. I've got a ton of postcards. I'll be here for the rest of the day into tomorrow. So come up if you'd like to work with us to bring the film to your community.

I just want to end by saying thank you.

You don't hear it enough from people in my industry, but on behalf of Gary Sinise and everyone at the Foundation, on behalf of everyone at the Brothers After War project, and my family, I want to thank you for your service, for your sacrifice.

And even more than that, I want to thank you for your devotion and love for our country and our fellow citizens. I want to thank you for the gift of freedom you have given my children and generations of children to come. Thank you. God bless.

PRESENTATION CIC GOLD MEDAL AND CITATION: SENATOR TOM CARPER, DELAWARE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: This year we have the honor and privilege of welcome – welcoming to our 125th national convention, the sole remaining Vietnam veteran currently serving in the United States Senate and a proud VFW life member of General W.W. Atterbury VFW Post 3420 in Newark, Delaware, Senator Tom Carper.

A career public servant and leader, he joined the Navy in the late 1960s and served as a naval flight officer, completing three tours of duty in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War before transitioning to the Naval Reserve, from which he retired in 1991 as a captain and a P3 aircraft mission commander.

In parallel, with and beyond his military career, Senator Carper has selflessly and dutifully served in many elected state and national roles, including Delaware State Treasurer, U.S. Congressman, Delaware Governor, and since 2001, U.S. Senator.

Throughout his time on Capitol Hill, he has continuously worked across the aisle to advance legislation for the wellbeing of our nation's veterans and their families. As he approaches retirement, we can think of no one better person upon which to bestow one of our most prestigious awards.

I am pleased now to present the VFW Commander-in-Chief Medal of Merit to Senator Tom Carper.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Commander-in-Chief Chief Gold Medal of America Citation awarded to Senator Thomas R. Carper, United States Senate, Delaware.

In recognition of his exemplary service and unwavering dedication, Senator Thomas R. Carper life member of VFW Post 3420 has distinguished himself through a lifetime of commitment to the principles of duty, honor, and service.

Having served 23 years in the United States Navy and Naval Reserves, he embodies the selflessness and sacrifice synonymous with the finest traditions of our armed forces. As the last Vietnam veteran still serving in the Senate and member of the Senate Veterans Job Caucus, Senator Carper has tirelessly championed the cause of veterans' rights and well-being.

His advocacy for improving veterans access to healthcare and ensuring timely processing of claims, advancing efforts to reduce unemployment rates for veterans, and supporting initiatives such as the Post-911 GI Bill reflect his profound understanding of the challenges faced by those who have served our country with valor and distinction.

His legislative initiatives, including the Federal Firefighter and Prevention Act of 2023 and co-sponsorship of key bills such as the Guard and VA Benefits Act and Dustoff Crews of the Vietnam War Congressional Gold Medal Act underscore his unwavering commitment to ensuring the well-being and rights of our service members and veterans.

His steadfast belief that as Americans, we have a sacred obligation to our veterans and their families that include a responsibility to ensure that our returning heroes have the resources and opportunities they need when they arrive home.

Serves as a guiding principle in his advocacy and leadership. Senator Carper's outstanding contributions to the welfare of our nation's veterans and his enduring dedication, sacrifice has justly earned him the highest level of admiration, respect, and gratitude of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

In witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hands a judicial seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States this 29th day of July 2024, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant General.

SENATOR CARPER: Good morning.

Anybody here ever been to Delaware? I mean, not just drive through and pay the toll, not just avoid paying a sales tax, going to one of the finest five-star beaches in the country, maybe getting your healthcare from the VA facility in Elsmere, Delaware.

Have you ever been there, Mr. Sarmiento?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Yes. I get healthcare at VA in Elsmere, Delaware. One of the best facilities in the country, sir.

SENATOR CARPER: Woo-hoo. There you go. All right.

There's some folks over here from Delaware and I'm going to ask them to stand up and take a bow. Stand up and take a bow, please. Think I actually think I have some names here.

Mark Worker (phonetic), Bill Wood, Tom Ardiaro (phonetic), Russ Hall, John Merrill, Steve McGuire, and I see some women over there, too.

Let's hear it for the women. Healthcare Center that Duane takes advantage of and -- along with a lot of other people in PA, in New Jersey, and Delaware.

When I first got out of the Navy at the end of the Vietnam War, moved to Delaware to get to MBA, and hook up with the reserve squad at Willow Grove Naval Air Station. But at the -- at that time, we had no facilities for women.

No -- we had veterans, a lot of other veterans that are women, but they didn't get any healthcare from the same place that Duane and I have gotten healthcare for many, many years. That's changed. That has changed.

Let's hear it for the women who didn't get the credit, didn't get the care that they deserved all those years. Let's hear it for them. Some of you know, some of you don't know, but I want to mention it anyway.

Delaware was the first colony to ratify the constitution. And before any other of the 13 colonies ratified the constitution, Delaware did. And Delaware became the first state as a result. And I -- I'm going to ask those who are able to stand up, stand up right now.

Stand up. Just stand up where you are. Stand up and reach over to the person on either side of you. Take their hand. Seriously. Stand up. Stand up. We're going to -- we're going to repeat the oath that we took all those years ago when we signed on with Uncle Sam and agreed to serve our country.

And I'm going to -- I'm going to say these words, and I want you to repeat after me. Are you ready? Are you ready?

AUDIENCE: Yes.

SENATOR CARPER: All right. Here we go. We, the people of the United States --

AUDIENCE: Of the United States --

SENATOR CARPER: In order to form --

AUDIENCE: In order to form --

SENATOR CARPER: A more perfect union --

AUDIENCE: A more perfect union --

SENATOR CARPER: Establish justice --

AUDIENCE: Establish justice --

SENATOR CARPER: Establish domestic tranquility --

AUDIENCE: Establish --

SENATOR CARPER: Provide for the common defense --

AUDIENCE: Provide for the common --

SENATOR CARPER: Promote the general welfare --

AUDIENCE: Promote the welfare --

SENATOR CARPER: And secure the blessings of liberty --

AUDIENCE: And secure the blessings --

SENATOR CARPER: To ourselves --

AUDIENCE: To ourselves --

SENATOR CARPER: And our prosperity --

AUDIENCE: And our prosperity --

SENATOR CARPER: Do ordain, establish this constitution --

AUDIENCE: This constitution --

SENATOR CARPER: For the United States -- forever --

AUDIENCE: Forever.

SENATOR CARPER: And ever.

AUDIENCE: And --

SENATOR CARPER: I just added that part. Good job. I want to thank you for the honor of bestowed upon me today. I'm happy to be here with my colleague in the U.S. Senate and Rand Paul, but I just want to say the honor that you bestowed upon me is undeserved, but not unappreciated.

I -- some people asked me earlier, backstage. They said, were you -- was I born in Delaware? I was not born in Delaware. My sister and I were born in West Virginia. Do we have anybody here from West Virginia, the Mountain State? Yes, we do.

Got a Beckley born up here. My sister and I were born in Beckley, and we didn't have much. It's a coal mining town. Hard work, deep faith. You understand me?

We all have the obligation to serve our country. My father was a chief petty officer in the Navy in World War II, and later --

AUDIENCE: Woo.

SENATOR CARPER: All right. He was a chief petty officer in the Navy, and later in Korea. And all my uncles served in World War II or Korea. My mom's youngest brother, Bob, was killed in a kamikaze attack on his aircraft carrier in the Pacific Ocean, my -- at the age of 19.

They have a great -- the bigger picture of him on the wall in my office in Washington. He is my all-time hero. But he died at the age of 19. They never recovered his body.

My grandmother is a Gold Star Mother. Give -- put your hands together for all the Gold Star Moms here and everywhere.

When anything, my dad used the GI bill after World War II to become a body repair man at Burleson Oldsmobile in Beckley, West Virginia. And later, he transferred and sort of worked off of that and became a claims adjuster for Nationwide Insurance.

And my father, one night -- one night, he came home from -- for supper, in West Virginia. And he said to my sister and me, he said to us -- we were like in, I don't know, 3rd, 4th grade.

He said, your mother, and I want you to go to college. And we said, well, we want to go to college, Dad. We were like, I don't know, 8 or 9.

And then he said, and we expect you to figure out how to pay for it. We said, really? And he said, really.

And from that day forward, I started thinking, how am I going to go to college? I don't have any money. And Civil Air Patrol -- anybody ever -- here ever been to Civil Air Patrol? Oh, we have? Got to be a Civil Air Patrol cadet.

And later, a -- I was fortunate enough to get a Navy scholarship, Navy Volunteer scholarship and became midshipman at Ohio State, and later on a naval flight officer, P3 aircraft mission commander, for many, many years.

My -- in homeroom. Anybody remember being in homeroom, and school only made announcements in the homeroom?

When I was a senior, I just missed out on the ability to go to the Air Force Academy and missed the cutoff date. And I thought, oh my God, what am I going to do? And I found out about ROTC. I could barely spell ROTC.

And I learned that it was a scholarship program. You could be in the navy, learn how to fly. And I said, sign me up. And the -- my guidance counselor said, it's not that easy. And -- but I did all the things I had to do, took counsel, and got physicals and so forth.

I graduated -- went off to Ohio State and graduated from Ohio State in 1968, right at the height of the Vietnam War. If you're a Vietnam veteran, stand up again. Vietnam Veteran, just stand up again. Let's hear it. Go on. Let's hear it.

I graduated in '68, headed off to join my squadron the next week. And then after that, headed off to join my squadron in Southeast Asia three times during the Vietnam War. My squadron was led by some outstanding officers. In the -- in the Navy world, the commanding officer of a P3 -- P3 squadron, he's a P3 commander. And I was fortunate to have about three commanders during the time I was with VP40.

Two of the three became admirals, if you can believe that. They were my role models. They were the people who guided me and taught me a whole -- a whole lot about leadership. And the last year that I was with my squadron, we won the Battle League for Excellence. The Battle League for Excellence.

I don't know if you've ever been on a ship for some -- or aircraft carrier, or a squad squadron. The Battle League for Excellence is about as good as you can get. Let's give VP40 a round of applause. Okay. Put your hands together, please.

After five years of service, I said, I want to get a -- an MBA. California to Newark, Delaware, the University of Delaware, and signed up. And before I had been there for like a week, I learned that I could take my DD214, like a bunch of you did, and I could take it and go to a VA facility and see what kind of healthcare I was eligible for.

And I drove up Route 2 to Delaware, to the VA facility. Presented my DD214. They said I was eligible for some of my dental benefits. And so I received them from a guy named Jerry Kayatta. Jerry Kayatta. He was a newly minute dentist. And he gave me dental care for a couple of weeks. And then I finally used all the dental care I needed, and I was about to say goodbye and thank him.

And he said, if I were you, I would go someplace else for your healthcare. I said, really? He said, I'd go someplace else. The morale here is bad, the quality of care is not good. You can do better than this, and you should.

And I thought to myself, somebody should do something to change that in this facility and every other one in the country. Today, that same facility where Duane gets his care and I get mine, a lot of other people do, is a role model for healthcare delivery in the VA system across America. They are the gold standard there.

We have Sea Box in Delaware, in every community-based outpatient clinic in every county in my state. We have cemeteries up and down the state, veteran cemeteries. We never had a cemetery before that.

Really, we have a Vietnam -- a veteran's home. We just opened about a month ago, a dental clinic there for veterans all over the state. So we have actually taken some unhappiness that came from my first treatment by the VA, and we have transformed that to make our healthcare delivery system by the VA something we can be proud of, and you could be proud of it, too.

Go ahead. Go ahead. Who knows?

You might -- you might be like Duane someday, driving -- and say, I need some healthcare. You could get off 95 in Delaware, after you pay the toll here, and get the healthcare there.

Let me -- before I -- let me just say this, that throughout my years in the Senate, there've been to quite a few of them, I have worked with Democrats and Republicans.

One of my favorite sayings is, bipartisan solutions is lasting solutions.

Think about that. Bipartisan solutions is lasting solutions.

Let me hear you say that. Bipartisan solutions is lasting solutions. There you go.

And that's -- we work across the aisle. And when we do that, we can do amazing things. We did it when passing the PACT Act, a couple of months ago, signed into law by President Biden. And now we're implementing it on something also that's called the 90/10 Loophole.

As many of you may know, this loophole allowed bad actors in the for-profit college sector to take advantage of our veterans' hard-earned GI benefits. Millions of military and veteran students used their hard-earned education benefits of a variety of educational institutions, including times of trade and vocational schools.

And my own dad, World War II veteran, used to in the original GI bill. Unfortunately, we've seen some poor outcomes for our veterans and for taxpayers from the bad actors in the for-profit college sector, and I knew we had to act.

Our one veteran misled or mistreated as one too many and I was proud. And my Senate colleagues came together unanimously to pass the amendment to Senator Jerry Moran, a Republican.

I'm a Democrat. He's a Republican from Kansas. Remember what I said earlier, bipartisan solutions are lasting solutions. And he and I worked together on a lot of stuff.

I work with your senator here as well. And anyway, we authored a -- an amendment to -- with Jerry Moran, to close the loophole once and for all. In closing, I want to mention two words, "claim shark."

Claim shark.

How many you've heard that term before?

Claim shark.

Well, you -- if you haven't, you're going to hear it a lot more. I've worked much of my career to make sure that our VA healthcare system, including our community-based outpatient clinics provide first class healthcare to our veterans, including female veterans.

And I've also worked to protect these benefits from bad actors who try to take advantage of our veterans. That's why just last week, just last week, I co-hosted our annual Veterans Summit in Delaware with Senator Chris Coons, representing Lisa Barr Rochester, who -- the secretary of the VA didn't - actually, the secretary of the whole VA operation in our country was there in order to raise awareness of the deceptive marketing tactics employed by those we know as claim sharks.

Claim sharks are -- who are these claim sharks?

Let me just tell you, because they're a huge pain -- a huge pain in the rear, and they -- and worse. But they are accredited -- unaccredited lawyers. There are consultants who try to take advantage of vulnerable veterans by offering to help them file claims with the Veteran Benefits Administration.

And then -- and then go on to take a significant percentage of the benefits that the veteran should receive, but because of the claim sharks, they don't get it. These predatory claim companies charge exorbitant fees for veterans for services provided free of charge by veterans for service organizations like you, like the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

At the summit last week, we spoke with dozens of veterans about the free resources available to them through the VA to help them avoid falling for scams and ensure that they know the full range of benefits to which they are entitled, a number of which come with the help of you in the VFW.

Let me close with this. Through -- throughout my tenure for this, I have worked to deliver on the kind of promise that I just made, and we'll leave it at that.

Let me close with this. Leaders are -- leaders are humble, not haughty. Leaders have the heart of a servant, understand that their job is to serve, not be served. Leaders have the courage to stay out of step when everyone else is marching to their own tune.

Leaders unite, not divide. They build bridges, not walls. Leaders surround themselves with the best people they can find.

When the team does well, the leader gives the credit to the team. When the team falls short, the leader takes the blame. Leaders don't build themselves up by taking others down. Leaders are aspirational.

They appeal to people's better angels. A fellow named Camus, a Frenchman named Camus, once said that leaders are purveyors of hope. Leaders always seek to do what is right, not what is expedient or easy.

They focus on excellence in everything they do. If it's not perfect, they say let's make it better. And leaders treat other people the way they want to be treated.

And finally, when leaders know they're right, they never give up. All of you that are part of the VFW here, in Delaware, and across the country, thank you for being that kind of leader for our country now, in the years to come, for a long, long time.

God bless you all. Thank you so much. Thank you. Come and see us at Delaware. Bring your DD214. And you can leave your wallet at your home because we have no sales tax.

All right. Welcome. Thank you so much. God bless you all. Take care.

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

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We got a long morning. Stop. I've got to move back. 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. commitment to assisting Taiwan maintain its ability to defend itself.

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 of abiding commitment to care for their veterans.

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

Now, it is my great privilege to welcome to our 125th national convention, a man who has selflessly served his country for the last four decades.

He's a graduate of the Air Force Academy of 1983 and alumnus at the National Defense University, and earned his Master of Science in Technology Engineering Management degree from George Washington University in Washington, DC.

During his time at the Veterans Affairs Council, he has served numerous positions of increased scope and responsibility to include senior inspector, senior executive officer, deputy department director, and department director.

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

VICE MINISTER CHIH-YANG: Morning.

AUDIENCE: Good morning.

VICE MINISTER CHIH-YANG: Commander-in-Chief, distinguished guests, and all heroes and heroine. I'm honored to be here on behalf of my Minister of Veteran Affairs Council of Republic China, Taiwan, attending your 125th national convention in this beautiful city, Louisville, Kentucky.

It's come into force since 1979, and marks its 45th anniversary this year. The act serves as a cornerstone of Taiwan's relation and offers a clear guideline for formulating and developing U.S. policy toward Taiwan.

These policies are crucial to Taiwan's regional security, peace, and prosperity. Taiwan and the U.S. has strengthened the security partnership recent years. We expect this partnership will be closer and stronger in the coming future.

Of course we'll never forget, we have the power ourselves. Taiwan has the most defense autonomy demonstrating our determination for self-defense in facing of threats from China.

Right this moment, I would like to express my gratitude for VFW long current standing support of my country over the years, especially for passing the resolution supporting Taiwan at the -- each national convention.

This valuable friendship will be always in our -- in our mind. Once again, thank you very much for having me here. I wish you a very successful convention, and happiness and health.

At the end, I would like to re-thank Commander-in-Chief, Duane Sarmiento, with the First Class Medal of Honor of Veterans Affairs Council, in recognizing of his dedication to maintain the friendship between our countries and promoting international justice and welfare of all.

Will you announce the dissertation for us? Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 4: Certificate of award to accompany the presentation of the Medal of Honor of Veterans Affairs Council to Mr. Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief of Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States of America, in recognition of his dedication in upholding the international justice, and safeguarding the international status of the Republic of China, and improving the welfare of Veterans.

A Medal of Honor, First Class, is hereby awarded on this 29th day of July 2024. General Yang Youbin, Minister Veterans Affairs Council, Republic of China.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: HONORABLE ANDY BESHEAR, GOVERNOR, KENTUCKY

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Each year, VFW Auxiliary members are welcomed in the cities across the nation to conduct the organization's business.

This year, we're immensely grateful for the hospitality government representatives, businesses, and community leaders here in Louisville and across the State of Kentucky have shown us. Today, we have the privilege of hearing from an individual currently holding the highest office in the state.

As the 63rd governor and 50th Attorney General of Kentucky, he has established a track record of serving Kentuckians in pursuit of greater good. Throughout his tenure as governor, he has made the military and veteran population a priority through initiatives, such as funding the new Bowling Green Veterans Center, mitigating barriers to military spouse employment, and participating in the governor's challenge to prevent suicide among service members, veterans, and their families.

Please join me in extending a very warm welcome to Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear.

GOVERNOR BESHEAR: Well, thank you, Commander, for that introduction. And I could not be more proud to look out and see thousands of American heroes in Louisville, Kentucky.

Happy 125th VFW Conference.

I recognize the land of the free because of the brave. I am a preacher's son, the son of a Baptist preacher, and on the other side, a World War II veteran. So I give thanks to God, and I give thanks to you.

I recognize that every opportunity that we have in this country, every opportunity that our kids, that my kids have, is because of the service and the sacrifice of our veterans since the inception of this great nation.

Our job is to repay your service by treating our veterans better every single day, and creating more opportunities for your kids and your grandkids than we ever could have imagined.

I'm so proud of Kentucky's Department of Veteran Affairs, which has now won our fourth straight Abraham Lincoln Pillars of Excellence Award, meaning we provide some of the best customer service for our veterans. We serve our veterans that need the most help.

All of our long-term care facilities are either four or five-star rated. Five being the very highest. And the commander just said it -- years of trying, we are finally building another veterans' nursing home in Bowling Green, the Spiller Center.

It was a long time coming, but we are going to serve our veterans in that community. Kentucky, I am so excited about what we have coming for your kids and for your grandkids. See, we are building the biggest, best economy in our history.

Since I've become governor, over 1,000 new location and expansion projects. We've broken every record for private sector investment, new jobs, best two-year wages, broken the record for exports, broken the record for tourism.

We're building the two biggest battery plants on Planet Earth. 5,000 jobs, and they are prioritizing hiring our veterans for those jobs.

I'll share something with you here today, and it's something that's been weighing on my heart, is that I promise you, I will never politicize your service, nor do I think that the United States ever should.

That became very personal to me after the attack on Tower 22. The attack on Tower 22 was an attack on our nation. It took the lives of three service members in Georgia.

What most people didn't know is a Kentucky National Guard was at and was leading the mission at Tower 22. And I still remember getting that call, turning on the TV, and seeing a office holder in Washington, DC.

The first thing they did was use it to attack somebody in the other party. They didn't say we're praying for the families of those three service members that were lost. They didn't say this was an attack on our country and we should all come together. Because when people attack the United States, we stand up as one people and push back.

We have got to get back to a place where we are Americans first, and Democrats and Republicans second. I recognize through my service that the things that people worry about most when they wake up in the morning aren't political at all.

They're not thinking about polls.

They're not thinking about parties.

They're thinking about their job and whether they make enough to support their family. They're thinking about their next doctor's appointment. And I am proud here in Louisville, we are working on a \$13 billion-dollar VA project. It'll be the newest and best hospital available to our veterans.

People think about the roads and the bridges they drive. There was a little bit of traffic coming in this morning, but I know whose fault that is.

They're thinking about the public safety in their community. They're thinking about the schools they drop their kids off at. I think we govern best when we don't try to move a country to the right or the left, but we try to move it forward for all of our people.

It is our veterans that have helped bring us together time and time again, helped us remember who we are by the example that you set. You set an example of freedom where everyone would have the opportunity to pursue their dreams in this great state, in this great country.

I'm grateful for your service, I'm grateful for your sacrifice, but I'm also grateful for your leadership. And at a time when things seem to be boiling in this country, some neighbors yell at other neighbors just because of registration box they checked when they were 18 years old.

We need your continued leadership to say there are real enemies out there. Our enemy is not each other. And it is our job in this difficult and dangerous world to stand as one country, to show the rest of the world that the United States is the greatest nation that has ever existed, and we will continue to be a leader on this world stage.

Welcome to Kentucky. Thank you all very much.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: SENATOR RAND PAUL

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Next, we have a special guest from right here, the great state of Kentucky, and he's an eye surgeon.

He was elected to the United States Senate in 2010 where he served on the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, in addition to his assignments on the Foreign Relations Committee, Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, and Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee.

Ladies and gentlemen, please give a warm welcome to Senator Rand Paul.

SENATOR PAUL: Good morning.

Mr. Sarmiento, thank you for the invitation and the introduction. It's an honor to be here with you along with so many heroes of this country and this organization. We all know that the VFW has worked tirelessly to ensure that those who have fought are represented when they return.

My family's association with serving in uniform runs deep. My father was a captain in the Air Force. Paul was a retired non-commissioned officer in the Air Force. As a child, my wife Kelly lived in various military bases around the world. My brother-in-law went to the U.S. Air Force Academy.

Sorry, we're kind of Air Force heavy in our family.

My nephew though, just retired after 20 years flying the P3 for the Navy. My team has significant military ties as well. Two of my staff are combat veterans and are members of your organization. Several people on my team have siblings and children who are currently serving our country in uniform today.

My staff and I see taking care of veterans as a vital mission, and frankly, our obligation to those who fought. That mission directly aligned with another, ensuring our country is strategic in its foreign policy. Indeed, I cannot imagine a more fitting occasion or group to understand, appreciate, and herald our country's position on the world stage and its foreign policy approach than the heroes of our foreign wars, those who have actually fought on foreign soil.

To me, there is no more important debate, no more important vote than a vote on whether or not to send our young men and women to war. I do not take this responsibility lightly. When war is debated, I carefully weigh the arguments for war against the risks to each and every soldier. I don't see war as some grand game of chess.

My views are best summarized by Eisenhower, who wrote, "I hate war as only a soldier who has lived it can, only as one who has seen its brutality, its futility, its stupidity." Since the attacks on 9/11, Congress seems to have forgotten Eisenhower's admonition.

Congress has simply abdicated its role in declaring war and left the decision-making to the president. Congress has allowed a vote in 2001, a vote I would've supported, a generation ago though, to be used to take our soldiers into combat across Africa and the Middle East, despite no authorization from a current Congress, despite no vote on whether we should be there.

We now have more combat missions in Africa than any place in the world.

Because of my steadfast belief that the constitution only allows Congress to declare war, I often stand alone. I'm sometimes a minority of one. But I promise you this: war is too grave a choice for Congress to run from or evade. I, for one, will not avoid or shirk my duty.

I pledge to you, Veterans of Foreign Wars, I will vote against any president of either party who tries to send our soldiers abroad without a declaration of war.

America was founded on restrained foreign policy.

Indeed, our first president pushed for trade and friendship with all, alliances in war with none, or as few as possible. We drifted from this throughout the latter half of the 20th Century, culminating with Vietnam.

Traditionally, American foreign policy was restrained, reserving military force as a last resort. It was a restrained realism in foreign policy that brought down the Iron Curtain, but avoided World War III. But our traditional restrained foreign policy has slowly been replaced by a desire to be everywhere all the time, by a belief that military intervention -- intervention is always the answer.

As a consequence, America has become mired in multiple civil wars in a variety of locations, with arguably limited national interests at stake. The authorization from 20 years ago to fight the perpetrators of 9/11 has nothing to do with having our military chasing down goat herders in Mali.

Yet four of our finest young soldiers died there in an undeclared war with a murky mission in Sub-Saharan Africa. Since World War II, Congress has allowed presidents to take us to war without the approval of Congress.

Fleckless leaders in Congress have allowed presidents to transform a mandate to eliminate those who attacked us on 9/11 to a limitless unfocused presence in dozens of countries. The war in

Afghanistan shows a congressionally approved, justified war against the 9/11 attackers somehow morph into a 20-year, trillion-dollar debacle with no clear mission.

The ignominious retreat from Afghanistan shows how weakness begets calamity and then overreaction. The catastrophic decision to have our final exit point be a civilian airport in a crowded urban area, instead of the isolated and defensible Bagram Air Base, led to the tragic deaths of 13 of our troops.

In the aftermath, a weakened Biden administration overreacted and sent a lethal drone that killed an aid worker and a dozen children. Instead of peace through strength, the result was carnage from weakness. As we contemplate and as we elect a new president, we should replace weakness with strength.

As the long war in Afghanistan was coming to a close, the world was busy changing. Civil wars of limited focus and limited consequence are being eclipsed by a great power conflict with the looming risk of disastrous outcomes.

Our threats have shifted from loose transnational terrorist organizations to hostile alliances with significant military power. North Korean ammunition is being used by Russian soldiers, supplied by Chinese technology, that enable Iranian weapons. The battlefield has also changed. The lethality of individual weapons has made wars of maneuver into wars of attrition.

When ten Ukrainian leg infantry soldiers with javelin anti-tank weapons can stop an entire Russian battalion tactical group, you end up fighting in trenches with an unsustainable need for artillery shells. Yes, things have changed. Shifting alliances and the face of war have dramatically changed, but our foreign policy has not.

American foreign policy has clung to intervention, which may ultimately be yielding more war than peace. The world has become more challenging since 9/11. It's time we evolve our strategies to better meet those challenges.

Through our intervention strategy, we have lost the ability to critically think about our foreign and national security policy. Many in Congress seem to have forgotten that to achieve peace through strength requires diplomacy.

Instead, both parties have tried to solve all of our international problems with sanctions, threats of violence, and the actual use of force. Yet American sanctions have not changed the actions of our adversaries.

I've repeatedly asked the Secretary of State to identify what, if any, changes Russia or China has initiated because of sanctions. I'm still waiting for an answer. What American sanctions do accomplish, though, is to isolate large portions of the world from our trade.

This form of trade isolationism threatens to make war more imminent. Whilst we must be prepared to defend our country and protect our troops, we cannot forget that war must always be a last resort. Our first choice of diplomatic engagement, the potential cost of war today is simply too high.

Today our chief adversaries have the capability to destroy our way of life as we do theirs. The consequences of a great power conflict between a Western alliance and Russia or China would be devastating.

We would feel those effects in all aspects of our life. Our commerce, our freedoms, our day-to-day existence would be impacted more than at any time in our history. As a measure of last resort, war must be squarely centered on a vital national interest that is clear to the American people.

Once that vital national interest is identified, we must craft a viable strategy to reach an achievable goal that is materially and economically sustainable with a clearly defined end state. The purpose of war is to make a better peace, not to perpetuate further war.

Importantly, we must hold sacred the principles of our founding fathers, which is espoused that no one leader may take our country to war. Rather for the nation to be willing to risk its sons and daughters, its blood, its treasure, war can only be waged with the consent of the people.

That required consent is to rise from acts of Congress, from the Constitution. Only Congress has the power to declare war.

My pledge to you is this. To continue to push to return the traditional American form of restrained realism, that these principles, war is a last resort used only to defend a clearly identified national interest through a viable strategy to achieve a sustained end state.

And even then, only with the consent of the people, if and when we must fight.

However, America needs a military clear-sighted and not distracted by woke ideology.

As Churchill reportedly said, people sleep peacefully in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf.

Churchill would be shocked to know that the American military that saved the day during World War II now pays for confused individuals to surgically change their sexual appearance. America still needs rough men and women for our defense.

Instead of spending a half a million dollars, taxpayer dollars, to remove the manhood of soldiers, let us today demand that that money be spent on the salaries of the rough men and women defending America.

Defending America means not letting our military mission be overridden by left-wing agenda unrelated to military readiness. With a \$34 trillion debt, our foreign policy needs to reexamine all foreign aid.

As a consequence of being everywhere all the time, American aid flows not only to dependent allies, but to countries that have the audacity to burn our flag. I promise you this. I will never, ever vote to send one penny of aid to foreign countries that hate us and burn our flag.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Those who suggest that we need to be everywhere all of the time will also do the most to ensure perpetual conflict.

They throw out historical examples claiming that we're once again in 1938 as we see the Russians invade Ukraine. My fear is that we're actually once again in 1914, and that escalation draws the sleepwalking closer to a nuclear confrontation.

Prior to World War I, the nations of Europe lacked the diplomatic intellect to avoid a calamity that killed millions of people in the horror of the trenches on the Western front and saw the rise of a communist empire in the East.

How different would the world have been had the diplomats of '24 -- of 1914 been better thinkers and the leaders more restrained? Was the honor of Serbia a vital interest to Czarist Russia or to Imperial Germany?

As we consider history lessons, let us remember that the governments who drew the world into the Great War, into World War I, over something that wasn't a threat to their vital interest, Czarist Russia, Imperial Germany, Imperial Austria, all were gone by the war's conclusion.

President Eisenhower said, "I have one yardstick by which I test every major problem." And that yardstick, is it good for America?

Ike unashamedly placed American vital national interest at the forefront of his thought. These philosophies must be our guiding light, which brings me back to those of you who have served to defend our country, our Constitution, our way of life. To best fulfill our leading role in the world today, we should follow your example.

You wore the uniform to protect your country, your families, and to secure a more peaceful future for your descendants. You didn't risk your life for a foreign flag. You didn't -- you -- you've fought for the American flag, for your family.

For your family and for the American in the foxhole next to you. We owe you a debt of gratitude, but I ask more of you. I ask you to remind everyone what it means to be American. Remind us that we can work together regardless of our backgrounds, our skin color, our religion, our political beliefs. We can work together.

Remind us that we owe our allegiance to the Constitution of the United States and the liberties which it guarantees our people. Liberties which were given to us by our creator.

Veterans of Foreign Wars, let your voices be heard, and remind Americans that we should not go lightly into war. We face many problems here at home. We face a crisis at our southern border. Before we send a single soldier overseas to secure other countries' borders, Congress needs to fix our borders here at home.

Strength of America is our spirit, not at the end of our rifles. Our way of life, our belief in liberty, our unshakeable trust that our rights come from a creator, not a government.

This is what gives us the power to be a great nation. Let us live by that example. Let us set that example. Let the world follow. It has truly been my honor to be here today.

Thank you and may God bless you and may God bless the United States of America.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Oh, yeah. We now have a video greeting from U.S. Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, from the great state of Kentucky.

Please turn your attention to the big screen.

(Video plays)

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: TRACY NOLAN, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETPOINT, HUMANA

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Ladies and gentlemen, as you know, our friends at Humana are no strangers to helping veterans.

Whether it's expanding social programs to help veterans fight isolation, combating food insecurity to help ensure veteran and military families have access to healthy food, or advocating for increased and expanded access to the highest quality healthcare available.

They've shown time and time again their commitment to veterans and their families.

From hiring more than 6,000 veterans and their spouses into the workforce, to creating military health and resilience initiatives to address health related social needs of the military community.

Humana's mission to serve as a trusted source for addressing health related social needs of veterans and their family has made them a great ally to our military and veteran community.

And now it brings me great pleasure to introduce to you our next guest, Tracy Nolan, Humana's Senior Vice President of MarketPoint.

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT NOLAN: I am so honored to be here today.

I give speeches internally and externally occasionally, and I will tell you that this one means so much to me. And the reason for that is that I am just so proud of what you-all do each and every day.

And on behalf of Humana, I just want to congratulate the VFW and the auxiliary on our 125th national convention.

Veterans and those that protect our country hold a very special place in my heart.

And I want to share a little personal story, if I may.

Every morning when I am not here in Louisville, because this is our headquarters, I am in my home office. And as I walk into my home office, I have a treasure that is sitting up and displayed in my home office, and it's a picture of someone who I just absolutely adore, my father.

It's a picture of my father after he left Naval Deployment School in Chicago. He served in World War II as an underwater demolition.

He's very quiet about his personal experience, and the story he told that I have an older brother and sister, and every time we asked dad what he did in the military, he said he was on a ship in the Pacific picking up garbage from other ships.

What we learned at his funeral was that my dad actually helped as an underwater demolition, go in and set up the beaches. He was very reserved about his personal experiences, very supportive of others who served and had and were serving, and really shared his love of the country.

And that was what made my dad so special. He installed a lifelong admiration of the U.S. military and all that we could do to serve.

And that is why I'm so honored to be here with thousands of veterans who have selflessly served, like my father, to continue to give back to our communities, make our country safe, and

through the VFW, it's just so important to all of those that do serve.

Humana -- 12 -- this is our 12th year anniversary with a VFW Humana partnership, and it was interesting to me, as I was thinking through this, I asked, what was the first convention?

And they said, "Tracy, the first convention was here in Louisville." So it's my honor to be back and celebrate our 12-year partnership back here in Louisville.

And then I asked the team, what does this mean, being here at a convention to them? And they said it's the high point of the entire year because the team cherishes the opportunity to meet with VFW and Auxiliary members.

We're excited to share with you what we're continuing to do to improve the lives of the communities where we serve, especially the veteran communities.

We've been a long-standing partner. In 1996, Humana administered -- started administering the TRICARE programs and today we currently care for over six million TRICARE beneficiaries in the east region.

We are also working together to do other things to support veterans with some of our key initiative programs. The newest program that launched, and super exciting, which is the Veteran Ready Healthcare Certificate Program.

What is really great about this program is it provides training to ensure that our primary care providers better understand the unique needs of aging veterans and their families.

Another bright spot is our veteran hiring program. Humana is highly dedicated, and we have a dedicated HR team that exclusively focuses on veterans and military spouses, including our wounded warriors. And we've hired over 6,000 amazing veterans and military spouses.

The military employees really do bring a significant and incredible value to our teams, and we are continuing to ensure that we move this program even further.

Today, our organization has a long-standing history of partnering with veterans in need.

And I'm so proud of our MarketPoint team, which is our sales organization spread out across all of the U.S. are partnering with local posts and auxiliaries on food and clothing drive. We've been join -- joined with you on your health fairs and other events and all to improve the lives of those who have served.

And if there's any out there today that we are not involved in, please see the booth and see our team because we want to work with you.

Uniting to combat hunger campaign has been one of our most impactful campaigns that we partner together with. Food insecurity is a major concern for our veteran population.

This joint initiative helps ensure that our nation's veterans have access to healthy foods, which can really help decrease physical risk and help with mental health problems. Because of the support, we've provided over one million meals. Yes, one 1 million meals this year alone, exceeding our goal.

Across 41 states with 150 VFW Posts and Auxiliaries, Humana employees have gathered more than 1,000 and -- or 100 -- 102,000 pounds of food and nearly raised \$183,000 for local food banks.

Since we've kicked off this campaign in 2018, we have worked together to provide over 5.6 million meals to those in need.

And I really am excited today that we are announcing in a press release that "Uniting to Combat Hunger" will expand to address the growing issues of veterans' homelessness.

Humana also understands the critical role that veterans service officers play with helping veterans, and through our relationship with the VFW, we have collaborated on an initiative that has developed training resources and best practices both to our Humana associates and to the veterans service officers.

Over last year, we worked with the veteran service organizations, including the VFW, to create an educational video called "15 Things Veteran Service Officers Want You to Know."

The course teaches veterans and their families about the role of veterans service officers and how they can help navigate benefits in the claims process. Because we all know that can be daunting at times. When you really need that help, we want to make sure that we're there for it.

We're also pleased to announce that we will continue to sponsor National Service Officer scholarships, a supporting program to have access to VA accredited service officers through the VFW.

Our collaboration through shines when we can also celebrate our troops. In May, the Humana team teamed up with USAA and the VFW in the Grand Ole Opry to serve -- to honor veterans and current military members at a special salute the troops performance.

The entire evening was dedicated to honoring service and sacrifice of our veterans and military. Unfortunately, I was not there, but I heard that it was an incredible event. It got a wonderful star-studded music field event.

What -- and what was best is it was a real tribute to our military.

On behalf of Humana, I just want to say how grateful we are, and I really mean that from the bottom of the green Humana Heart, that we have an opportunity to work alongside with you.

We share in your mission to serve veterans, the military, military families, and our communities, and we are proud to be an advocate on behalf of our veterans.

On behalf of myself, Humana, my dad, our family, and all that have served -- have served and the families of that in support, I just want to thank you for continuing to support our heroes, country heroes and families and to put health first.

Thank you.

PRESENTATION: COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF GOLD MEDAL OF MERIT AND CITATION
TO PRASAD REDDY, PRESIDENT & CEO, TWISTED X

(Audience shouts Whoo)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Whoo! Don't start. Whoo! I tell you I can't stop.

Now, as president and CEO of Twisted X, Prasad Reddy has gone above and beyond to satisfy that pledge.

Hold on, I think I missed a page.

Let me -- I missed a page.

I'm like mid-sentence here. Let's start again.

See, you got me all woo and I got all screwed up here.

No, stop. I already missed a page for it.

Four to five decades ago, our next guest completed his American naturalization ceremony, where he pledged to return the support and kindness he received from VFW and Auxiliary members after they wholeheartedly welcomed him to our great nation with open arms, encouragement, 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 all those we serve.

Founded in 2005, Twisted X has spent decades designing and developing handcrafted, design-patterned western and comfort-casual footwear for men, women, and children.

It has also launched a specialty line of patriotic VFW inspired boots and shoes, complete with unique American flag elements. Prasad's patriotism and commitment to the VFW runs deep.

Without further ado, I'm pleased to present the VFW Commander in Chief Gold Medal of Merit to a great friend of the VFW, Mr. Prasad Reddy.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Commander in Chief Gold Medal of Merit in Citation, awarded to Prasad Reddy, President and CEO, Twisted X, in special recognition and sincere appreciation of his dedication and commitment and support the Veterans of Foreign Wars and our Voice of Democracy program.

Through his unwavering support, Voice of Democracy state student winners were given a step up to begin their next level of education, through his sponsorship of the Voice of Democracy program for the last six years.

And doing this -- in doing this, his generosity has given these students confidence and has

shown them that they are not alone on their journey. His extraordinary commitment to this program reflects our proud ideals and high standards and has justly earned him the utmost respect and appreciation of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States in its auxiliary.

In witness whereof, we have here unto set our hands in the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States this 29th day of July, 2024, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander in Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant General.

MR. REDDY: Quite an honor, most unexpected and -- anyway.

Commander in Chief, distinguished guests, and all the heroes and heroines here, I -- I'm lost.

I can -- it's hard for me to say anything.

Just every year, I look forward to this convention only to see all the heroes and heroines. The minute I get into the hotel, I see in the lobby, that's it. Since that time when I leave, I'm always lost lots of words and all the great things you do for to keep my family, myself, and all the citizens safe and secure.

It's -- there's no way to thank you.

And I know VFW is very helpful, trying to help to take the needs to -- unmet needs of all the veterans, whether it's physical, mental, financial, and there's not too much we can do except be small contribution.

And I'm so honored to be part of this VFW organization and to be here.

And thank you very much for everything you do. Again, no words, no thanks are enough to say.

You know, just I'm lost. Okay.

Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: He thinks he's lost.

Well, he just handed me a -- he just hands me this and goes, "This is for you."

From Twisted X, Inc. to the VFW Foundation, Surge to Support campaign, \$70,000.

That was a shocker. Thank you, Prasad.

INTRODUCTION/SPEECH: SOPHIA LIN NATIONAL VOICE OF DEMOCRACY 1ST PLACE WINNER

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: 77 years. That's how long the VFW'S Voice of Democracy program has been reaching, inspiring, and helping to mold future leaders of this great nation, America's youth.

Since its inception, this premier 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 the many liberties afforded to them.

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

Last year, we asked high school students across the globe to reflect on and tell us what are the greatest attributes of our democracy.

Sophia Lin, a High School Junior at BASIS Scottsdale in Scottsdale, Arizona, answered with a poignant essay reminding us that the greatest attributes of our democracy lie in the stories of individuals who strive for a better future and principles of justice that uphold our society and the strength that diversity brings to our nation.

A beacon of hope, a promise of opportunity, and a symbol of resilience, these are the attributes that make up our democracy.

Her moving essay on this theme earned her the esteemed title of National 2023- '24 Voice of Democracy winner. And in March, I had the opportunity to present Sophia with her first place \$35,000 scholarship check.

Sophia represents the many thousands of young people who participate in the scholarship program every year, and she along with her peers have clearly shown that our nation will be in very

capable hands when it's time for them to lead us in the future.

Please join me in welcoming and celebrating Sophia Lin's achievement as the 2023- '24 Voice of Democracy winner.

MS. LIN: Good morning, everyone, and thank you so much for having me.

I'm truly so honored for this opportunity and to be here with all of you.

I thank you for your service and for your sacrifice and helping uplift the next generation of individuals like myself.

It has truly been an absolute honor to be this year's champion of the Voice of Democracy audio essay contest. And I'm so grateful for the opportunities that I have been given, and especially to VFW for helping to uplift and empower our nation's most important voices.

So without further ado, I'll share my speech, "The Stories that Weave our Democracy."

My parents came to America in their early 20s with nothing but one suitcase and \$100 in their pocket. Graced with student visas and a goal of pursuing higher education, they wanted a better life in the land of the free.

I'll never truly understand the fear they must have faced, packing up their lives to move 7,513 miles from their family. I can't relate to living on a \$90 budget each week, sharing a tiny house with a local family who generously agreed to rent them a room at a discounted price.

I can't imagine eating pork parts for more than two years that a nearby restaurant gave to them for free. Yet, looking back, my mother has never characterized her American experience as one of hardship.

She has always said every day was filled with hope, a hope that was enough to wake us up each and every morning.

That same hope is what fueled my father, as he earned his Ph.D., despite broken English and a limited vocabulary. It took my parents 11 years from the day they first landed in this country to become U.S. citizens.

I asked my mother why she kept persevering in the hopes of one day becoming an American citizen. She said, "Because to be a citizen is to be a part of democracy, America's democracy, where dreams and visions gracefully advance through ballots cast and voices heard."

She remembers the excitement of flying for the first time, passport in hand to the land of freedom.

She remembers the day of her naturalization marked with nebulous joy and bittersweet victory. She remembers proudly parading her "I voted" sticker after her first time voting because America welcomed her to its democracy and she finally had a say, a say in a country she couldn't originally call home, but now can.

A say in their newfound responsibility to help steer the ship of democracy they've chosen. She remembers signing the contract to our first American house with tears in her eyes, a small two-bedroom, one bathroom building. The house that she was able to call home.

My parents' journey is a testament to the ideals that underpin our democracy, it's a place where every person, irrespective of their origin has the chance to rewrite their own story.

This opportunity, liberty, equality, and responsibility are what drive individuals to sacrifice their lives to protect. In my quest to delve deeper into the greatest attributes of our democracy, I've also embarked on a mission to explore democracy through the perspective of those who have defended it.

Through the Veterans Heritage Project, I had the honor of interviewing 100-year-old Jewish Navy veteran Dolly.

Despite our 84-year age gap, we bonded over the traits that make us both American.

Dolly was only 20 years old when she first enlisted. As one of the first cohorts for the women accepted for volunteer emergency service during World War II, she was transported to New York, Oklahoma, and Washington, DC for rigorous Naval assignments.

Dolly's enlistment was initially inspired by her father, a World War I Navy veteran. And even though her Jewish family painfully experienced American antisemitism post World War I, she joined

550,000 other American Jews without any hesitation to fight for justice, human rights, and equality.

That is the pride of American democracy, a pride to resist aggression and terminate discrimination. She described an era when democracy was threatened and young Americans like her rallied to preserve it.

Dolly underscored that democracy isn't just about casting votes. It's about fighting, both physically and literally, for a set of ideals that make life worth living: freedom, justice and the pursuit of happiness.

People like my parents, the hardest workers I know who will give up anything to make sure that I have what I need to live out my American dream.

People like Dolly, a 100-year-old, whose age provides no barrier to her relentless passion for our country. And people like me, a 16-year-old who constantly seeks to understand our nation's past and present in hopes of changing our future, make up our democracy.

My parents' gratitude to those who have uplifted them and Dolly's lifelong dedication to our country motivate me to become an active participant in our democracy.

The greatest attributes of our democracy lie in the stories of individuals who strive for a better future, the principles of justice that uphold our society and the strength that diversity brings to our nation, a beacon of hope, a promise of opportunity and a symbol of resilience.

These are the attributes that make up our democracy.

Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Now you know why she was the winner.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: MATT MILLER, DIRECTOR MILITARY FAMILY & ENGAGEMENT-ORACLE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: It is my honor to welcome to the 125th VFW National Convention, a gentleman who represents a company with decades of experience in empowering those who deliver care to advance health and well-being.

Matt Miller currently serves as the Director of Veteran Family -- Veteran and Military Family Engagement with Oracle.

He is the former Chief of Staff for Congressman Ben Cline in Virginia and has over 30 years of experience in senior level roles in both legislative and executive branches of government, to include serving as the White House liaison for the VA and Assistant Secretary acting of the Department of Labor's Veteran Employment and Training Service.

Miller is a Navy veteran who served two tours in Iraq, two civilian DOD tours in Afghanistan, and served in Guantanamo Bay shortly after 9/11.

He has worked as a policy director for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America and is a member of the Board of Veteran Services for the state of Virginia.

Please welcome our esteemed guest, Matt Miller.

DIRECTOR MILLER: Thank you, Commander, for that introduction.

And if you guys could see what I see out here, you'd be amazed, you'd be proud.

I'm honored and humbled to join you and all the patriots assembled here today to celebrate the 125th VFW National Convention.

But before I begin, I want to take care of one piece of business. I want to have a little fun. You guys all right with that? All right. I understand you're a big Ric Flair fan, right? You have the woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Yes, sir.

DIRECTOR MILLER: All right. I grew up watching Chief Wahoo McDaniel's, Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka, Ric Flair, Dusty Rhodes, and all of them.

So, in honor of you, I want to do my best Ric Flair impersonation, all right?

So here it goes. Here it goes.

I'm styling and profiling, I'm a limousine riding, jet flying, Rolex wearing, proud Navy veteran and

life member of VFW 3150 in Arlington, Virginia.

All right. Now that we got that over with.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: May I go sit down Matt?

DIRECTOR MILLER: Yes, sir. You may, thanks for asking.

I want to personally thank Ryan Gallucci and his great team and give special recognition to, I think Bob Wallace, who is here. Bob has forgotten more about veterans issues than I'll ever know. I just want to thank both of them for their friendship and guidance.

This morning, I want to take a few moments to highlight the important collaboration that is making a profound difference in the lives of veterans.

The partnership between Oracle and the VFW centered around the deployment of the electronic health records, or EHR. We are thankful for your guidance as together we move to finish this vital task.

As we know, veterans have faced unimaginable challenges, not only during their service, but also in transitioning to civilian life. Ensuring they receive the timely and efficient healthcare they deserve is both the responsibility and a priority for us all.

As mentioned, I recently retired from 30 years of federal service and I can say one of the things that I looked forward to the most was the visit from the VFW to our congressional office to discuss -- to discuss your priorities.

Now, some of you may know this and some of you may not, some of the younger members may not, but I've said that the VFW is like the old E.F. Hutton commercial. When the VFW talks, people listen.

They are among the leading voices and effective advocates in the veteran space. Theirs was an important voice in the recent passage of the PACT Act, the Forever GI Bill, and the MISSION Act, to name just a few.

They have been your voice in every major achievement that ensures veterans and their families receive the care they deserve. The partnership between Oracle and the VFW signifies a shared vision of respect, support, and improvement for our veteran community.

We are unified in the mission to provide an enhanced healthcare experience, ultimately contributing to better health outcomes, mental well-being, and overall quality of life for our veterans.

As we continue to honor those who have served, let us recognize the importance of innovative partnerships like this one. The deployment of the electronic health records through the -- through the Oracle and VFW alliance is not just a technology achievement. It is commitment to ensuring that our veterans receive the most competent and comprehensive healthcare they can.

Together, Oracle and the VFW are paving the way for a future where our veterans can focus on healing and thriving, safe in the knowledge that their health information will ultimately be accurately managed and easily accessible.

Now, for those of you who want to know more about the EHR issue, Oracle policy folks will participate in a executive breakout session tomorrow afternoon at 2:00 p.m. in Room 114.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be with you this morning, but more importantly, thank you for standing in the gap in defense of freedom.

God bless you and may you continue to bless our great nation.

Thank you. Woo.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: CHARLES DJOU, SECRETARY
AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Honoring and commemorating America's fallen service members is something very near and dear to the heart of the VFW. And the American Battle Monuments Commission's work towards this mission is worthy of our admiration and support.

Established by Congress and signed into the law by President Warren Harding in 1923, the

American Battle Monuments Commission commemorates the service, achievements, and sacrifice of U.S. Armed Forces.

Today, ABMC administers and operates and maintains 26 permanent American burial grounds on foreign soil, the final resting place for some 124,000 American veterans, and it maintains 31 federal memorials, monuments, and markers worldwide.

ABMC cemetery superintendents and their assistants expertly ensure the grounds remain in pristine condition 365 days a year. The work and mission of the ABMC is truly honorable.

Here with us today, representing ABMC's honorable and vital work, is the Commission Secretary, retired Army Reserve Cardinal, Mr. Charles Djou, an Afghanistan War veteran with more than 20 years of service in the Army Reserve and a former U.S. representative from Hawaii's First Congressional District who served on the House of Armed Services and Budget Committees.

A man whose experience and dedication to the mission of honoring, go to serve him an excellent friend to the VFW.

Please welcome Retired Colonel Charles Djou.

COLONEL DJOU: Good morning, thank you very much for inviting me here. On behalf of my staff, my boss, the Commander in Chief, President Joseph R. Biden, I really appreciate coming here to the VFW.

I appreciate coming here, not just as myself, as a veteran from Afghanistan, but I appreciate coming here in that my service in the Army, the Army had sent me to get my strategic broadening certificate from the University of Louisville.

So it is a nice -- a little bit of a homecoming for me to join you-all here today.

During my few minutes with all of you, I thought I'd like to share with all of you a little bit about my agency, the ABMC, the American Battle Monuments Commission. I want to share with you about who we are, what we do, and why we do it.

The Commander already shared with you a little bit about our background. We are an agency that's 101 years old, we run 26 of America's military cemeteries and 31 of America's battlefield memorials spread across 17 countries around the world.

But I think what's more important than what we -- who we are, is what we do and why we do it.

The United States, our people and who we are, when we send our young, when we send our brave, when we send our nation's finest to go across the distant lands and to fight, we Americans are a little bit different.

You see, unlike any other people, unlike any other country, the United States, we do not fight for a king or a crown. We do not fight for a sect or denomination, we do not fight for a motherland or a fatherland, and we Americans most certainly never ever fight for conquest or plunder or enslavement of another people.

No.

Instead, we Americans, when we send our young, when we send our brave, when we send our finest, and we send them to fight, and yes, sometimes make the ultimate sacrifice, we fight for simple, humble values. The values of freedom, liberty, and democracy.

And unlike any other nation in this world, unlike any other peoples in the history of mankind, we Americans do something utterly unique.

When the mission is accomplished, when the job is done, when we Americans have taken down the tyrant and stood up democracy, we go home.

All that America asks for in exchange for the service and sacrifice, yes, ultimate sacrifice of our young and our brave, are a few small plots of land to bury our dead.

My agency, the American Battle Monuments Commission, we are responsible for maintaining and managing those few small plots of land. And so I say to all of you here in the VFW, please come.

Come and see your American military cemeteries, please come and see your American battlefield memorials.

You know, for me, as the Agency Secretary and leading the ABMC, one of my most frustrating

experiences is every year, year after year, I see millions of Americans coming to Paris to go see the Eiffel Tower or the Louvre Museum.

I see millions of Americans going to Rome to go see the Colosseum, millions of Americans going to visit Florence to see Michelangelo's David.

And don't get me wrong, don't get me wrong, I am -- I'm not against tourism. After all, you do not get elected to become a member of Congress from the state of Hawaii without being pro- tourism.

I support tourism, but one of the things that disappoints me is all those millions of Americans who travel abroad to go visit the Eiffel Tower in Paris or the Colosseum in Rome or see David in Florence oftentimes don't realize that the reason you can go see the Eiffel Tower, the reason you can go see the Colosseum in Rome, the reason you can still see Michelangelo's David in Florence is because of the sacrifice of those tens of thousands of Americans who gave their lives to make sure the dark shadow of tyranny and fascism that had spread through this land was yanked back and the light of freedom can be seen in all of those lands.

And so that's why I say to each and every one of you, please come. Should you find yourself in France, please come, come and see Pointe du Hoc, come and see the location where the United States Army Rangers volunteered to scale those sheer vertical cliffs to silence the Nazi guns raining down on Omaha Beach and Utah Beach.

Volunteered knowing that the United States had no exit plan for them, knowing that they would either succeed in their mission or die trying. I say to you, come, should you find yourself in Great Britain, come to the Cambridge American Cemetery, the resting place of nearly 10,000 American service members, both in our plots and our Walls of the Missing.

A location which memorializes particularly for all those airmen who lept [sic] to the skies from Great Britain to take the war to Hitler's doorstep. And yes, tens of thousands of them never came home, literally blown out of the sky.

I say to you come, come to the Manila American Cemetery, the largest American Cemetery located outside of the United States, where nearly 15,000 American service members rest in their plots and nearly 36,000 Americans are noted on our Walls of the Missing.

And it is at this location where those American Marines, who conquered -- consecrated those lands that we now remember as Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Saipan, Quang, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa, rest as a final home.

With those thousands of American Navy Sailors, who sailed across the Pacific to push back Imperial Japan and went to their watery graves never to be found again, are memorialized and remembered on those walls at your American Cemetery in the Philippines.

Please find it in yourself, if you have not already visited, make it a point sometime in your lifetime to visit one of these 26 American cemeteries or 31 American memorials, that my agency humbly and honorably manages.

And if you can't come, come and visit us on our website at abmc.org.

And I leave you all with, why it is that our agency does what we do. You know, members of the VFW. I know, I get it. I know that for so many of us when we look around our nation today, we can be a little bit disappointed.

I know when we see what happens on American social media and see some of the banality that goes on on all of these websites. I know that when we look at our government sometimes over in Washington, DC, all you see and all you hear is shouting and division and hyper partisanship.

My agency is here to tell you that we Americans, we still have it, we still got it.

And for all the division, for all the banality that you may see happening in America today, we serve as a reminder to all Americans, to this world, that America still has something special within our soul.

And we maintain these sites around the world, not just to honor the history, not just to honor these service members, although we do do that and that is important. We also maintain these sites so we can remind America, so we can remind the world of what the true cost of liberty is and what the real

price of war is.

And we serve as a reminder to all authoritarian dictators today who wish to do ill to America and our people that that is a price we have paid before, and we will willingly pay again to ensure the success of freedom.

Because friends, we know, I know, and we will make sure the world always knows and remembers that the world's most powerful weapon system is not a T-72 tank manned by mercenaries crusading across the planes of Ukraine.

It is not a Fuji aircraft carrier, patrolling artificial manmade islands in the South China Sea. It is not a terrorist who kills and slaughters innocence in the name of a wicked ideology. No, the world's most powerful weapon system was, is, and shall forever be a free people willing to fight for freedom.

That is who we are, that is what we do, that's why I am here.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for inviting me here. May God bless each and every one of you, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the United States of America.

Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Not only is Charles a veteran, he is a life member of the Honolulu Post Life -- VFW member of the Honolulu Post. Thank you, sir.
(Audience Woo)

COMMANDER SARMIENTO: Stop. You guys are crazy. You're killing me.
(Background chatter)

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: MAJ. GEN. JOHN RICHARDSON (RET.),
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT MILITARY AFFAIRS-USAA

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

Retired Major General Johnny Richardson is the senior vice president and head of Military Affairs for the 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 solution to its more than 13 million members.

Two star general and decorated combat veteran who served four combat tours in Iraq and a combat tour in Afghanistan, Johnny retired from the army after a distinguished 33-year military career and brings a wealth of experience, a forward thinking approach to leadership and a deep compassion for military families to USAA.

A member of VFW Post 76, please put your hands together and join me in welcoming to our 125th VFW National Convention, our esteemed guest, USAA Senior Vice President, head of Military Affairs, Johnny Richardson.

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT RICHARDSON: Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, VFW members, and fellow veterans, good morning.

As a -- as a current member of VFW Post 76, the oldest post in Texas, it is a profound -- there they are, Republican Texas out there.

It is a profound honor to stand before you today at the 125th Veterans of Foreign Wars National Convention. And I am deeply humbled to be in the presence of so many who have selflessly served our nation.

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to the VFW leadership for their tireless efforts in supporting our veterans and their families. Your dedication to this cause is an inspiration to us all.

As Duane stated, I recently retired after 33 years of service with the United States Army and today I serve as the head of military affairs at USAA, an organization dedicated to serving

those who have served.

My journey has been shaped by the values and experiences I gained in the military, and I am honored to continue serving our community in this new capacity. As I reflect on my years in the Army, I am reminded of the camaraderie, the sacrifice, the resilience of our military family.

Whether it was the heat of battle or the calm of garrison life, the bond we share as service members is undeniable and unbreakable. We learn to trust each other with our lives, to lead with integrity, and to face the challenges with unwavering determination.

These values are not just military principles. They are life principles.

They guide us long after we hang up the uniform, they remind us that our duty to our nation and to each other continues far after we retire from active service.

When I transitioned to civilian life and joined USAA, I found an organization that embodies these same values. USAA was founded by military members for military members, with a mission to facilitate the financial security of its members, associates, and their families.

Every day we strive to support our veterans and their families, ensuring they receive the respect, the care, and opportunities that they deserve. Today, our veteran community faces numerous challenges, from mental health issues and homelessness to transition to civilian careers, our veterans need our unwavering support.

At USAA, we are committed to addressing these issues through various initiatives and partnerships. We work closely with organizations, like the VFW, to provide resources, advocacy, and support services that can make a real difference in the lives of veterans and their families.

One of the key areas we focus on is financial readiness.

We understand that financial stability is crucial for a successful transition to civilian life. Through financial education programs, personalized advice, and innovative products we aim to empower our members to achieve financial goals.

Additionally, we recognize the critical issue of veteran suicide, which continues to impact our community deeply. That's why USAA proudly supports Face the Fight. This Face the Fight initiative launched in June 2023 with our founding partners of Humana Foundation and Reach Resilience as a comprehensive effort to reduce veteran suicide.

This initiative aims to break the stigma around asking for help and significantly reduce the veteran suicide rate. Face the Fight has not only grown to more than 175 coalition partners, but has garnered significant financial support. More than \$85 million have been pledged through 2027 from the founding partners and many other private organizations and donors.

This funding supports programs that align with public health best practices for suicide prevention and align with CDC strategies. Together, we are committed to be making a difference and saving lives.

The VFW effort in advocating for veterans rights, providing community support, and ensuring that our service members receive the recognition they deserve is invaluable. Your work resonates deeply with all of us who have worn the uniform. Your commitment to service, patriotism, and community sets a standard for others to follow.

As we look to the future, it is vital that we remain united in our purpose. Our strength lies in our solidarity, in our shared experiences and in our collective resolve to support one another. Let us continue to build a community where every veteran feels valued, respected, and supported.

Let us strive to ensure the sacrifices made by our fellow service members are never forgotten, and that their contributions are always honored.

In closing, I want to express my deepest gratitude to each of you.

Thank you for your service, for your dedication, and for your continued commitment to our nation and our fellow veterans.

Together we are making a difference, together we uphold values that define us, and together we can ensure a brighter future for all who have served.

Thank you and may God bless our veterans; may God bless the United States.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: CONGRESSMAN MORGAN MCGARVEY, D-KY

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: It is now my privilege to introduce U.S. Congressman Morgan McGarvey, representative of the citizens of Kentucky's Third Congressional District.

Since taking office in January '23, Representative McGarvey is a member of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, Mew Democrat Coalition, HBCU Caucus, Gun Violence Prevention Task Force, and Co-Chair in Congressional Bourbon Caucus.

Is that for real? That's pretty cool. That's pretty cool.

He sits on the House Veteran Affairs and Small Business Committees working to protect our veterans hard-earned benefits and help small businesses in Louisville grow and thrive.

Please welcome a Louisville native, Representative Morgan McGarvey.

CONGRESSMAN MCGARVEY: Good morning, everybody.

Welcome to Louisville, Kentucky. And that's us right here.

And, Duane, next time you are in DC, you got to come by the office and check out the Bourbon Caucus selection.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I'll be -- I'll be--

CONGRESSMAN MCGARVEY: I'll know he is coming because I'll hear him coming down the hallway with a woo.

So good to have you-all here. It is a truly an honor to welcome you to both my congressional district and my hometown. We hope you, for your 125th convention, enjoy all that Louisville has to offer: our bourbon, our bourbon, our bourbon.

I'm kidding, we have -- we actually have great bourbon.

But I hope you enjoy all that Louisville has to offer. We have fantastic horse racing. Just a few blocks from here, every Louisville slugger wooden baseball bat is made right here on Main Street in Louisville, Kentucky.

We have an incredible food scene that I hope you guys get to enjoy while you're here. I also hope that you experience the warmth and the appreciation that we Louisvillians show to our veterans every day.

Due to our proximity to Fort Knox, Louisville is the home to tens of thousands of veterans, and we are always grateful for your service, for your patriotism and what you have done for our community and our country.

As the grandson of combat World War II veterans, as the brother of someone who is in his 21st year of active duty service, I can tell you, I have grown up with an appreciation for the selfless sacrifice of our veterans.

And in Washington, DC, I continue that work. Now, I know you guys, I don't -- and I don't care which news channel you watched this morning, but if you watched the news channel this morning, it probably had something negative to say about what's going on in Washington.

I think that's because Washington in the -- in the news gets covered, like NASCAR. You only see who gets the checkered flag or the crashes. The reality is a lot more happens that you don't see.

And I'm on the Veterans Committee, and I'm not saying we don't occasionally have our squabbles, but I do think that the Veterans Committee is the greatest place of bipartisanship in Washington, DC. Because if we can't agree on taking care of the men and women who are willing to put on a uniform and quite literally sacrifice everything for us, then what can we agree on? We got work to do.

There is still work to do, and whether it's the Major Richard Star Act, whether it's the Elizabeth Dole Act, whether it's taking care of our veterans who are abroad and not getting the care they need, we have work as a Congress to do.

And again, I'm not saying that we'll always agree, but bipartisanship to me is the willingness to listen. And the Veterans Committee is always willing to listen, to see how we can take the best care of you.

So I just want to welcome you. And most importantly, and this is my honor, is to say thank you. Thank you for your service, thank you for your sacrifice. To the veterans here, we are so appreciative of you.

To the family members of the veterans, we are appreciative of you too, and the sacrifices you made. Just know -- yeah, give them a round of applause.

Just know that Louisville welcomes you with open arms, I welcome you with open arms, and may God bless our troops, our veterans, and these United States of America.

Thank you all for being here.

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

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: How many caregivers do we have here today?

Please stand. We have no one? Thank you for all you do.

Fulfilling a caregiver role for our nation's veterans is not an easy task. The diverse, complex issues our veterans face require a unique degree of care and support. Balancing everyday life with the healthcare needs of a veteran can cause mental, emotional, and physical distress for the caregiver.

Caregivers need proper support, and every one of us can help today.

To tell us how -- to tell us how, here with more is VFW Executive Director of our Washington office, Ryan Gallucci.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GALLUCCI: All right. Thank you, comrade Commander in Chief.

Look, this has been an exciting morning for the VFW, and on behalf of our Commander in Chief, I - you know, I got to get in on the game, too.

Woo. Okay. Yeah. All right. Anyway, we'll try it to again at the end.

All right. So, thank you, comrade Commander in Chief.

Look, I'm up here to talk about the work that we do out of your VFW Washington office and the work that each of you do back in your states and departments to advocate with your legislators to advance the issues that are important to veterans, family members, caregivers, and survivors.

Now, over the last few months, even before Commander in Chief Duane Sarmiento appeared before the joint session of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees, we were championing a veteran's package.

You know, it was supposed to happen before Veterans Day last year, it was supposed to happen before the end of the year, it was supposed to happen before our Washington conference and the Commander in Chief's testimony.

But there were fierce negotiations happening behind the scenes on what is now H.R.8371, or commonly called the Elizabeth Dole Act. This is a big veterans package that's up for consideration before Congress and it has provisions in it that not only help those hidden heroes, those caregivers who care for our veterans, I mean, many of you are here in this room, many of you were caregivers before we even knew what to call it.

But aside from the caregiver provisions in that bill, there are provisions to improve healthcare for our veterans, there are provisions to improve GI bill benefits for veterans looking to go to college. There are so many provisions in this bill that would help just about every veteran, family member, caregiver, survivor in this room that it is our top priority to get this done before the end of the year.

Now, it's disappointing to say that, you know. We wanted it done last year and here we are again. Now, here's what we're asking for.

You may have seen in your Action Corps Weekly that the VFW hosted a press conference with Senator Elizabeth Dole and our partners from other veterans organizations at the VFW Washington office, championing H.R.8371, the Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act.

Now, this has been months and months of negotiation behind the scenes, bipartisan negotiation between Republicans and Democrats to make sure that we had the best possible policy for our veterans,

but we're not quite there yet.

What I will do is I will call your attention to the QR code that we're going to put up on the screen now. Take out your phones and participate in our latest action alert. I will wait.

Look, if I got time to do it, you got time to do it.

There we go.

All right. I'm done.

How about you? All right.

Look, so here's what's happening. We have -- we have bipartisan negotiation and there's a group that we need to get on board when they are back home in their districts.

The House Democratic Caucus has some concerns about the bill, but I think we can easily address those. And I think you'll see in this action alert that we do easily address those.

Let's go back in August to each of our districts and say, hey, we need you on board, veterans need you on board, we're counting on you to be on board with this package.

Now, I really appreciate Congressman McGarvey joining us here today, just had a great conversation with him about these issues, and I think we're going to get there.

But the only way that we're going to get there is if VFW members and Auxiliary members, like you here in the room today, take action and let your member of Congress know what we think and what our veterans need and deserve.

Now, before we go, I have one last thing to present to our Commander in Chief. And I would ask that the sergeants and VFW Washington Office Administrative Director, Bob Jackson, please join me here, alongside Commander in Chief Duane Sarmiento.

Now, something happened this year.

Who here has been to the VFW Washington office before?

That's a lot of hands.

Please come by -- if your hand didn't go up, come by and see us. We're always open.

Now, Commander in Chief Duane Sarmiento was one of the first commanders in chief, that I've seen in my time with the VFW, who really embraced the Commander in Chief's office at the VFW Washington office.

So much so that what we've done, alongside the Quartermaster General, is we are making this a celebration of the VFW Commander in Chief. You know, there were a few times down there where we took calls from Senator Klobuchar about helping -- about veterans causes, whether it's the Star Act, the Afghan Adjustment Act.

And there were times, you know, just meeting with your staff, your team, as you were preparing to go on Capitol Hill.

Moving forward, our commitment to the Commander in Chief is we're going to celebrate you in that office. But then when your term comes to a close, we're going to honor you and the contributions that you to our mission.

So without further ado, Commander in Chief Sarmiento, we are honored to present you with these photos of your hearing before the joint session of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee.

Comrade Commander in Chief, that concludes my report.

PRESENTATION: OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECT AWARD

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Comrades, from filling Humvees with food donations and buses with school supplies, to making repairs to veterans' homes, cleaning up veteran cemeteries and other community service projects around the world, the VFW's nearly 125-year history is, at its core, centered around service to others.

So much in fact that our members volunteer more than five million hours and donate more than \$45 million every year. Those hours and dollars clearly display our organization's dedication to

enriching and bettering the communities around us. I believe our mission towards service is one of the reasons why the VFW Day of Service initiative has become so popular. Helping our communities and giving back, it's why we decided to serve our nation and it's why we continue to serve today.

Today, it is with great honor that we recognize and celebrate four VFW posts to exemplify this tenant in both word and deed day in and day out. Their unwavering commitment to community service should serve as an inspiration to us all.

The outstanding National Community Service Poster of the Year Award stands as a testament to the exceptional dedication and selflessness displayed by the members.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join us in welcoming and giving a big round of applause as we welcome to the stage post representatives from the 24 outstanding National Community Service post of the year.

From the Western Conference, VFW Department of Montana's Butte VFW Post 1448.

From the Eastern Conference, VFW Department of New Jersey's Kelley- Oliveira-Stanton Police Memorial Post 12173.

From the Big 10 Conference, VFW Department of Ohio's Paul C. Ladd Post 1148, and last but not least from the Southern Conference, VFW Department of Oklahoma Sparrow Post 4884.

The work you do every day for our veterans is a true inspiration and we applaud your posts for the service, dedication, and commitment. I believe we only have two of those post reps here, if I could have you come up to get your award and photo with the Commander in Chief.

(Background chatter)

ADJUTANT GENERAL DAN WEST: Comrades, as we transition to our All-American awards, we need to clear the stage. Yeah, that's you. You all can go.

I would like to make an introduction to a unique thing that I discovered while in the Department of Arkansas.

For those of you unfamiliar, the elected Department of Arkansas State Surgeon is required to carry the surgeon's bag, so they don't know how to spell, with them at all times. If they leave it unattended and it disappears, there is a ransom that must be paid by the state surgeon.

\$100 for every department that it visits, \$50 for every post that it visits within its own borders of Arkansas, \$500 if it travels out of country. I'm proud to announce that this bag, in the last few months, has traveled to 13 different departments.

Could I please have the Arkansas state surgeon, Glen Powell, to come up here and reacquire his surgeon's bag. Here he is over here.

I want you to know I put some pink handcuffs on here so he can keep better track of it.
(OFF THE RECORD)

PRESENTATION: CONFERENCE STREAMERS/CUP

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: This year, 20 departments earned All American, putting in countless hours to beat the challenge.

Today I want to take a moment to also distinguish and honor the VFW departments that solved the high bar we set and pushed higher and farther than we could have imagined. Reaching over 102 percent in membership this year, with the highest percentage of membership in the conference, I'd like to recognize our best of the best.

Those departments are, from the Big 10 Conference, Indiana with 102.3 percent membership. From the Eastern Conference, the great state of New Jersey with 102.8 percent membership. From the Western Conference, Montana with 104 percent membership.

And last, but certainly not least, from the Southern Conference, Arkansas with an astounding 108.5 percent.

Please put your heads together to show our appreciation as their department leaders join us on

stage to accept streamers in recognition of their hard work and dedication.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: So, where are my conference people at to receive their streamers? You guys should have been lined up. Let's go. Where you at, conference streamers? I see.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: All right. We're coming, we're coming.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENT: Just like the Stanley Cup the VFW Commander's Cup embodies all the VFW stands for and not only sets its holders apart as a conference with the highest percentage of membership at the end of the membership year but entitles them with the official bragging rights as the best of the best for the next year.

It gives me great pleasure to present the 2024 Conference Membership Trophy to the Southern Conference.

Have them join me on stage.

Where are they?

Having joined me on stage, '23-'24, State Commanders representing the departments of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Please join me in giving them a big round of applause for all their hard work.

PRESENTATION: TRIPLE CROWN AWARDS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: To earn the coveted VFW Triple Crown, a commander must achieve All-American at the Post, District, and Department levels.

The VFW's own Triple Crown winners must have a proven history of exceptional leadership, be established at recruiting – in recruiting new members and demonstrated strong support of VFW programs.

By achieving All-American at the Post, District, and Department levels, these commanders join an elite group that can boast an unparalleled achievement. I'm honored to recognize this year's VFW Triple Crown -- Triple Crown winners here on stage behind me.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arkansas, Jeffrey Byrd and Teddy Pipkin. I just called for 304.

From the Department of Arkansas, Jeffrey Byrd, Teddy Pipkin.

From the Department of Arizona, Stephen Van Bergen.

From the Department of Europe, George Gilgore.

From the Department of Georgia, Leonard Ott and Patsey Schrieber.

From the Department of Indiana, Sheila Corcoran.

From the Department of New Jersey, Jeffrey Walden Jr.

From the Department of the Pacific Areas, Alexander Fores.

From the Department of South Carolina, James Fox.

From the Department of Virginia, Tommy Hines and Kenneth Wiseman.

And from the Department of Washington, Craig Dougherty.

Let's give this special group of commanders a big round of applause, as we say congratulations for attaining such a notable record of achievement.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Thank you, guys. Great job.

PRESENTATION: 2023-2024 ALL-AMERICAN POST, DISTRICT, AND DEPARTMENT COMMANDERS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: When I hear the words All-American, words like energetic, commitment -- 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 over and over this past year.

Having reached 102 percent or more membership, this year's recruiting efforts were a success --

be proud of the work and effort you put in day in and day out. Today, it brings me great pride to celebrate and honor these commanders' unrelenting passion and devotion to our organization.

I'm proud to announce we have 20 department commanders, 115 district commanders, and 865 post commanders who have earned this highest, most distinguished title, and most are here with us today.

I will now be joined by Senior Vice Commander Chief Al Lipphardt, Junior Vice Commander Chief Carol Whitmore, to present All-American Commander awards to this exclusive group.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arkansas, Marcus W. Davis, Post 2242.

From the Department of Arkansas, Jeffrey Todd Byrd, Post 2330.

From the Department of Arkansas, Marc A. Calcaterra, Post 4548.

(OFF THE RECORD)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arkansas, Jeffrey D. Hill, Post 2952.

From the Department of Arkansas, Carlton D. Rodney, Post 7769.

From the Department of Arkansas, Don Thompson, Post 8525.

From the Department of Arkansas, Jerry T. Tobey, District 1.

From the Department of Arkansas, Jonathan A. Mullins, District 4.

From the Department of Arkansas, Norman G. Powell, Post 7514 and District 5 Commander.

From the Department of Arkansas, Thomas A. Thelen, District 13.

From the Department of Arkansas, Teddy Pipkin All-American Department Commander.

From the Department of South Carolina, Dwight M. Hora, Post 8760.

From the Department of South Carolina, Mark E. Jacob, Post 12102.

From the Department of South Carolina, a dual recipient, Charles A. Holloway II, District 2 Commander and 6740 Commander.

From the Department of South Carolina, James Fox, Department Commander.

From the Department of Montana, Matthew R. Walker, Post 1507.

From the Department of Montana, Fred Hamilton, Post 276.

From the Department of Montana, James Layton, Department Commander.

From the Department of Mississippi, Freddie Pate, Department Commander.

From the Department of Mississippi, Terry B. Tolar, Post 4877.

From the Department of Mississippi, Lonnie G. Daughenbaugh, Post 12124.

From the Department of Utah, Brian C. Bell, Post 12061.

From the Department of Utah, Heath Silcox, Department Commander.

From the Department of Georgia, Pamela L. Thomure, Post 6330.

From the Department of Georgia, Janita G. Mastin, Post 9143.

From the Department of Georgia, James C. Davis, Post 12002.

From the Department of Georgia, Wayne Collins, All-American Commander 5080.

From the Department of Georgia, Harold D. Bergeron Jr., Post 6570.

From the Department of Georgia, and you're going to love this name, George Costanza, Post 5659.

From the Department of Georgia, a dual recipient, Curtis S. Talley, District 6 and Post 7116.

From the Department of Georgia, another dual recipient, Dwayne M. Kilbourne, District 1 and Post 5408.

From the Department of Georgia, Jason L. Nichols, District 2.

Hello, Patsy.

From the Department of Georgia, James M. Jensen, District 7.

From the Department of Georgia, Denisa P. Adams, District 9.

From the Department of Georgia, and one of my good friends, Patsey Schreiber, Department Commander.

From the Department of the Pacific Areas, James E. Collins, Post 2485.

From the Department of the Pacific Areas, Thomas N. Robertson, District 3.
 From the Department of the Pacific Areas, Alexander Fores, Department Commander.
 From the Department of the Pacific Areas, Murray S. Simpkins, Post 1054.
 From the Department of Alaska, Dana G. Becker, Post 10682.
 From the Department of Alaska, William Yudiskas, Department Commander.
 From the Department of Virginia, Troy J. Wagers, Post 392.
 From the Department of Virginia, Doris M. Wallace, Post 9808.
 From the Department of Virginia, Sandra Jean Terry Coble, Post 1115.
 From the Department of Virginia, Sherry D. Moore, Post 3103.
 From the Department of Virginia, Beth A. Ford, Post 3219.
 From the Department of Virginia, Christopher J. Smith, Post 1264.
 From the Department of Virginia, Ashley M. Gurley, Post 12202.
 From the Department of Virginia, Robert B. Meade, Post 12217.
 From the Department of Virginia, Robert P. Ruffolo, Post 12218.
 From the Department of Virginia, Todd A. Taylor, District 8.
 From the Department of Virginia, Victor Gill Kowalewski, District 1.
 From the Department of Virginia, Kenneth Wiseman, District 10.
 From the Department of Virginia, Gary Adams Jr, Department Commander.
 From the Department of Arizona, Stephen P. Van Bergen, Post 7968.
 From the Department of Arizona, Nedra Seeley, Post 9972.
 From the Department of Arizona, James J. Shanley, Post 9400.
 From the Department of Arizona, Morgan A. McHose, Post 10254.
 From the Department of Arizona, Hope Blood, Post 12210.
 From the Department of Arizona, Bill "Jumper" Schaeffler Sr., Department Commander.
 From the Department of Nevada, Lonnie Spikes, Post 12101.
 From the Department of Nevada, Bill Pierce, Department Commander.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: And from the great state of New Jersey, Steven E. Stokes, Post 3525.
 From the Department of New Jersey, Kenneth Hanzl, Post 5481, and District 10 Commander.
 From the Department of New Jersey, James A. Wisor, District 15.
 From the Department of New Jersey, Wilbur B. Martin, Post 1333.
 From the Department of New Jersey, Jeff Walden, Department Commander.
 From the Department of Washington, Brandon D. Vice, Post 7392.
 From the Department of Washington, Chad M. Hassebroek, Post 9430.
 From the Department of Washington, Keith Wooldridge, District 15.
 From the Department of Washington, Craig Dougherty, All-American Department Commander.
 From the Department of Idaho, Douglas E. Welch, Post 10043.
 From the Department of Idaho, James N. White, Post 142.
 From the Department of Idaho, Ralph W. Binion, III, Post 5423.
 From the Department of Idaho, David T. Frei, Post 4902.
 From the Department of Idaho, Kenneth Babcock, Department Commander.
 From the Department of Oregon, David B. Lowe, Post 180.
 From the Department of Oregon, Anthony L. Barber, Post 12140.
 From the Department of Oregon, Allen Anderson, Department Commander.
 From the Department of Europe, Derrek M. Gibson, Post 12139.
 From the Department of Europe, Stanley W. Allgood, Post 10312.
 From the Department of Europe, Emilio Andujar, District 3.
 From the Department of Europe, Mark Primmer, Department Commander.
 From the Department of Indiana, Edith M. Toll-Seiler, Post 2695.
 From the Department of Indiana, Laura J. McKee, Post 1587.
 From the Department of Indiana, Rebecca E. Murphy, Post 1282.

From the Department of Indiana, Richard D. Lineberry, Post 2457.
 From the Department of Indiana, Paul S. Feyka, Post 908.
 From the Department of Indiana, Kenneth A. Lange, District 6.
 From the Department of Indiana, a dual recipient, Wendell G. Richards Jr., District 2 and Post 1154.

From the Department of Indiana, Larry L. Dennis, District 11.
 From the Department of Indiana, Daniel S. Petersen, District 1.
 From the Department of Indiana, Sheila Corcoran, Department Commander.
 From the greatest state in the union, Kevin N. Williams from Texas, Post 9191.
 From the Department of Texas, Richard G. Mitchell, Post 4372.
 From the Department of Texas, Timothy P. Qualls, Post 2205.
 From the Department of Texas, Christopher G. King Jr., Post 10427.
 From the Department of Texas, Warren A. Close, Post 3892.
 From the Department of Texas, Richard B. Lively, Post 7873.
 From the Department of Texas, Reggie L. Williams, Post 1406.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Texas, say it ain't so, Willie E. Keller Jr., Post 12209.

From the Department of Texas, Kathleen E. Jackson, Post 3904.
 From the Department of Texas, Todd L. Hokinson, Post 430.
 From the Department of Texas, James T. Rundberg, Post 6380.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Texas, and one of my greatest friends, Lupita N. Perez, Post 12178.

From the Department of Texas, Bradley S. Wilson, Post 1480.
 From the Department of Texas, Mitchell M. Fuller, District 28.
 From the department of Texas, Edwin A. "Buddy" Grantham, District 4.
 From the Department of Texas, J'Layne M. Vines, District 5.
 From the Department of Texas, Gary Land, District 14.
 From the Department of Texas, Robin A. Johnson, District 10.
 From the Department of Texas, Robert Rouse, District 1.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Texas, and yes, it's his birthday today, Larry Sanders, Department Commander.

From the Department of North Dakota, a dual recipient, Scott A. Kaufman, Post 7564, and Department Commander.

From the Department of Alabama, Robert A. Schmidbauer Sr., Post 6683.
 From the Department of Hawaii, Lynn B. Mariano, Post 8616.
 From the Department of Hawaii, Jason C. Seal, Post 110.
 From the Department of Tennessee, Brandy Barnes, Post 11160.
 From the Department of Tennessee, Richard A. Farmer, Post 12206.
 From the Department of Tennessee, Kimberly A. King, District 5.
 From the Department of Tennessee, Richard C. Moon, Post 5154.
 From the Department of Tennessee, Daniel R. Parsons, Post 6908.
 From the Department of New York, James M. McGovern, Post 1666.
 From the Department of New York, Brian S. Graham, Post 150.
 From the Department of New York, Harold J. Patchin, District 3.
 From the Department of Maryland, Joseph T. Allen, Post 3285.
 From the Department of Maryland, Michael J. Eason, Post 9376.
 From the Department of Maryland, a dual recipient, Willie E. Evans, District Commander and Post 9619.

From the Department of Kentucky, Darrell B. Casey, Post 4075.
 From the Department of Kentucky, David R. Rhodes, Post 10281.

From the Department of Kentucky, Scott A. Van Tassell, District 4.
 From the district -- as you were.
 From the Department of New Mexico, James F. Burdine, Post 10763.
 From the Department of New Mexico, Mack E. Dyer, Post 12184.
 From the Department of New Mexico, Mark A. Decker, District Commander.
 COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: How you doing, Tab?
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of New Mexico, Mark A. Bowman, District 7.
 From the Department of North Carolina, Mike A. Baker, Post 670.
 From the Department of North Carolina, Tab Brown, Post 2771.
 From the Department of North Carolina, Edward E. Beard, Post 6018.
 From the Department of North Carolina, Mickey Joe Biggs,
 District 8. From the great state of Florida, Kevin S. Tice, Post 12204.
 From the great state of Florida, David N. McKinley, Post 12186.
 From the Department of Florida, Gary D. Clark, District 8.
 From the Department of Ohio, Joseph M. Warminski, Post 3767.
 From the Department of Ohio, David A. Sauers, Jr., Post 2920.
 From the Department of Ohio, John R. Gorman, Post 8445.
 From the Department of Louisiana, James H. Bensho, Jr., Post 3665.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Getting ahead of myself. Is that what you're saying?
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Louisiana, Robert E. Boudreau, Sr., Post
 12182.
 From the Department of Louisiana, a dual recipient, Pearl J. Cornish (phonetic), Post 7017 and
 District 8.
 From the Department of Louisiana, James D. Baroque, Post 9822 and District 4, a dual recipient.
 From the Department of Nebraska, Amy J. Buckley, Post 7970.
 COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Show you a secret.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Nebraska, Charles B. Roberts, District 4.
 From the Department of California, Larry D. Beebe, Post 9896.
 From the Department of California, Michael J. Lynn, Post 3173.
 From the Department of Virginia, Joe B. Higley, Post 8364.
 From the Department of West Virginia, John J. Krieger, Post 3522.
 From the Department of West Virginia, William H. White, Jr., Post 3466.
 From the Department of West Virginia, Thomas Torrence, Post 6450.
 From the Department of Missouri, Randall S. Wansing, Post 2866.
 From the Department of Michigan, Scott E. Taylor, Post 1075.
 From the Department of Michigan, Todd Wadzinski, Post 4037.
 From the Department of Pennsylvania, Randy J. Rice, Post 3376.
 From the Department of Thomas A. Sally, Post 5954.
 From the Department of Pennsylvania, Richard K. Cassum II, Post 1532.
 From the Department of Iowa, Michael J. Borah, Post 738.
 From the Department of Massachusetts, James J. Barrett, Post 523.
 From the Department of Massachusetts, Jon L. Samjo, Jr., Post 2125.
 COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Excuse me.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Illinois, Doug Jamison, Post 1739. From
 the Department of Illinois, Joshua Sieg, Post 755.
 From the Department of Illinois, Gary D. Holmes, Post 342.
 From the Department of Illinois, Seth E. Floyd, Post 5346.
 From the Department of Wisconsin, James A. Cairo, Post 11308.
 From the Department of Colorado, John King, Department Commander.
 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 8: Grab these.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: All right.
Comrades, be on recess to 2:15. We'll reconvene at 2:15.
(OFF THE RECORD)

CONVENTION CREDENTIALS REPORT: BETTY GRIPP

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We will now call to order our afternoon business session. I will now request that Betty Gripp give us the initial credentials report.

MS. GRIPP: Thank you. Good afternoon. Oh.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Excuse me.

MS. GRIPP: Good afternoon, Commander in Chief, council members, and delegates.

The opening credential report for the 125th National Convention. At the close of business 4:00 p.m. yesterday, July 28, 2024, total delegates registering their credentials, 1,844 registered. Registered voting strength delegates 6,000.

I mean 8,653.

Department Commanders, 46, National District Council members, 44, total Past Commander-in-Chief, 15, total National Officers, eight.

That is my report, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Betty! Betty!

AUDIENCE: Betty! Betty!

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you, Betty.

REPORT: CONVENTION RULES BY PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LARRY RIVERS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We will have a report on the Committee on Convention Rules, Chairman -- by Chairman, Past Commander-in-Chief, Larry Rivers.

CHAIRMAN RIVERS: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief.

The Committee on Convention Rules met Sunday, July the 28, 2024. I would like to thank the members of the staff for all of their assistance.

Please refer to your Schedule of Resolutions booklet, the white booklet, on Pages 45 and 46, where you will find the proposed rules for the convention. During our deliberations, one change was made. Rule number 12 was amended to identify the order of voting precedents in the event of a roll call vote.

With that, the committee has agreed on the following recommendations, which I respectfully submit for your consideration. And keeping with VFW practice, I will read the recommended rules for the convention.

Number one, that in accordance and conjunction with the National Bylaws in the Manual of Procedure, and with the exception noted here, the current edition of Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, shall be recognized as parliamentary authority for this convention.

Number 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.

Number 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 by consent of two-thirds of the voting strength of the convention present voting provided the chairman of the convention committees may speak as frequently as necessary in connection with reports of their committees.

In the event of controversy, the presiding officer shall not entertain any motion which will curtail further debate without affording the maker of the resolution or a member of the delegation presenting the resolution an opportunity for five minutes of final rebuttal.

Number four, all resolutions offered by individual registered delegates must bear the

endorsement of the department commander or if they're 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 12:00 p.m. Wednesday, July the 31, 2024 and must be accompanied by a written explanation as to why the resolution was not presented to the department convention for consideration.

Number 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.

Number 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 action at the request of any delegate, the others being voted upon collectively.

After action has been taken on all such resolutions, the chairman shall read the number entitled of those resolutions which the committee has disapproved. A resolution disapproved by the committee shall be automatically rejected unless a motion is made and seconded that it be approved, in which case, it shall be brought up for debate and convention action.

Number seven, this convention will not consider any resolution dealing with the expenditure or appropriation of organizational funds.

Number 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 provided by the members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

Number eight [sic], only delegates to this convention may speak in debate, make motions, and vote during convention proceedings.

Number 10, delegates shall vote individually on any item of business coming before the convention and cannot be required to vote as a block with others from their delegation.

11, voting strengths shall be determined by those delegates registered as of the close of the credential registration booth the previous day and is reported to the national convention.

The department commanders will receive, prior to the beginning of each business session, a list of posts that have properly registered delegates. Only delegates representing those posts listed on the report will be accorded voting privileges.

If a roll call is required -- number 12, if a roll call is required, the following is the order of voting precedents: National Officers, Past Commanders-in-Chiefs, National Council of Administration, Department Commanders, followed by unaffiliated posts.

Ascending alphabetical order by department will be utilized for the National Council of Administration and Department Commanders. The department commander of each delegation shall poll their delegation's registered delegates on the floor and shall announce the vote of their delegation.

Number 13, registered delegates of the delegation may arrive at a vote in any manner, but shall announce it in terms of full units and not in terms of a fractional part of a vote.

14, reconsideration of a motion or resolution upon which final deposition 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 a contemplated action prior to the close of that meeting.

Number 15, when the report of the department commander of the delegation is not acceptable to all registered delegates of the delegation and a poll of the department of registered delegates is demanded by three registered delegates in said department, the adjutant general shall poll the registered delegates without discussion of question.

Number 16, in accordance with Section 621 of the National Bylaws, voting shall be by acclamation as defined within Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, except a roll call may be demanded by ten registered delegates representing post in separate departments or by order of the commander-in-chief.

Number 17, nominating speeches for the national officer shall be limited to five minutes each. Time allocated to encompass all seconding speeches shall be limited to four minutes total. Nomination

and election of national officers will be held according to the Congressional Charter Bylaws and Section 617 of the National Manual of Procedure.

Number 18, registered delegates and persons recognized by the chair shall be entitled to 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.

Number 19, the commander-in-chief may, as may be necessary and appropriate to informing the membership of the activities of this convention, authorize that all or parts of the convention be streamed through website of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

Number 20, consent of two-thirds of the voting strength of the convention present and voting is necessary for suspension of the rules of this convention.

That completes the reading of the convention rules. Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I move that these rules be adopted by the convention at this time.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We have a motion on the floor to accept the convention rules. Coming out of a committee doesn't require a second. Any questions on the motion?

Any questions on the front motion?

All those in favor signify by saying aye.

AUDIENCE: Aye.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Opposed? Carried unanimously.

CHAIRMAN RIVERS: 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 that's currently displayed on the VFW Convention app, and as from time to time may be adjusted by the commander-in-chief, be adopted as the official agenda of the 125th National Convention.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: The motion out of the committee doesn't require a second.

You don't hear -- I have a hard time hearing when you're sitting on stage, so I have a hard time hearing what it is to try to repeat it. So I will have it repeated if anybody needs it.

Is there any questions on the motion? Any questions on the motion? All those in favor signify by saying aye.

AUDIENCE: Aye.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Opposed? Motion carried unanimously.

CHAIRMAN RIVERS: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, thank you.

COMMITTEE REPORT: NATIONAL BYLAWS, MANUAL PROCEDURE & RITUAL
BY PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF VINCENT "BJ" LAWRENCE, CHAIRMAN

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We'll now have a reporting committee on National Bylaws Manual of Procedure and Ritual. Chairman is Past Commander-in-Chief, Vincent B.J. Lawrence.

CHAIRMAN LAWRENCE: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief. The committee on National Bylaws Manual of Procedure and Ritual met Sunday, July 28, 2024.

At this time, I'd like to introduce the vice chairman of this committee, Past Commander-in-Chief Paul Spera from the base State of Massachusetts.

I would also ask all the members of the committee stand to be recognized at this time.

Committee members, please stand. Let's give them a round of applause. They worked hard.

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.

Please note proposed Bylaw Amendment B-2 and Manual of Procedure Amendment

M-1 were both withdrawn by the commander-in-chief prior to the convening of the committee meeting in lieu of Resolution 204, which was submitted for consideration by the Finance and Internal Organization Committee.

Commander-in-Chief, the following proposed amendments were deemed out of order in committee. C-1, B-1, B-3, M-3, and M-6.

First, I'll read the committee's recommendation 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 when asked, state their name, post number, and department and ask that that 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 set asides.

After we complete the proposed amendments, the committee recommended for adoption, 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: B-5, B-15, and B-16.

Commander-in-Chief, keeping with the rules of this convention, I move these proposed amendments are adopted.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We have a motion out of the committee, which doesn't require a second, to adopt B-5, B-15, and B-16.

Recognize Microphone number 3.

COMRADE WALLACE: Good afternoon, Commander-in-Chief, Adam Wallace, Post 328, Department of Wisconsin. I request B-15 be set aside.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Request B-15) be set aside?

COMRADE WALLACE: Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: B-15 will be set aside.

Seeing no others. Oh.

Microphone number 1.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 10: 06342. Round as well.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 12: B-15.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: B-15 is set aside. We just set it aside. Why – B-15, we just -- we just -- Comrade, we just set B-15 aside.

Seeing no and no others. We'll -- we will vote on the rest in block form.

All those in favor signify by saying aye.

AUDIENCE: Aye.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Opposed?

Ayes have it.

Now to the set aside, B-15. Discussion?

I'm sorry, Microphone 3.

COMRADE WALLACE: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Adam Wallace, Post 328, Department of Wisconsin. B-15 is a concerning bylaw change.

Currently, two-thirds vote is the most important things that we do in this organization, like amending bylaws, selling buildings, disciplinary action. And also, too, our current bylaws require the assistant quartermaster general and the assistant adjutants general also be two-thirds majority.

And in keeping in consistency, I believe that B-15 should be maintained at two-thirds majority. Two-thirds majority. And while I recognize that it is the commander's-in-chief -- commander-in-chief's appointment, the adjutant general is the very most important appointment that that commander makes as effectively the CEO of our organization.

And I think that lowering this could be a slippery slope leading to potential cronyism and not getting the right person in that office.

And if we cannot, if our national council cannot, by two-thirds majority, elect or affirm the appointment of an adjutant general, then that person probably doesn't belong in that office.

And with that, I request a roll call vote on this matter.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 2.

COMRADE WISEMAN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Ken Wiseman, National Council member, Department of Virginia.

Comrades, we are sent by you, who elect us as National Council member, to do two things. One, most important, make good decisions to move the organization forward. And two represent the interest of our departments.

As you just heard, the National Adjutant General is one of the most, if not the second most important, positions we fill with the chief being the most important. The chief does get to pick the Adjutant General, but the chief should be picking an adjutant general with a vision and a belief of what is best to move forward with this organization.

We're not picking the post officer of the day. You're picking someone to supervise 200 employees, a \$100 million budget, and to move an organization that's existed since 1899 forward. If a two-thirds vote is so difficult, we should reexamine who the candidates are.

Now, you may hear that in the past, this changed from 50 percent to two-thirds and no one knows why. We know exactly why. Number one, the convention ordered it to change.

You, the members, had the foresight that there should be balance between the commander-in-chief and the National Council in between the conventions on these exceptional issues.

And, number two, there was significant political concern about some of the candidates we were hearing about, and we're hearing some of that concern again. We should not erode the importance of how we pick something or pick someone to fill a position that is so important.

Please vote no on this. And I yield back, Comrade Commander-in-Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you, comrade.

Microphone number 3. We had only one?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 10: Yeah, one was first, Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone number 3.

I'm going up by -- look, I'm going by who Department -- Terry is saying who was up with the number first.

COMRADE YOUNG: Commander-in-Chief, Ken Young, Department of Nebraska Commander.

I -- I'm here to second a roll call vote on this. This is something -- a subject matter that really cannot be handled just by a simple voice vote on this.

This matter, obviously, has been demonstrated by the last two speakers as being that serious. And there's many of us that feel this way. So, I would simply second the motion of a roll call vote.

Thank you, Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 1? Microphone 1.

COMRADE RIVERS: Comrade and Commander-in-Chief, --

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Sir.

COMRADE RIVERS: -- thank you. My name's Larry Rivers. I'm a delegate from VFW Post 1736 in Alexandria, Louisiana.

Perhaps I speak probably from a little experience because I've had the opportunity and honor to serve you both as your commander-in-chief and also as your adjutant general.

And you know, as I said in the committee meeting yesterday, I wasn't a member of the committee and listened to the debate.

The first thing I thought was, I can't imagine a commander-in-chief trying to appoint an adjutant that couldn't get two-thirds vote, nor can I imagine an adjutant general wanting to serve that didn't have a two-thirds vote of the support of the members on the council.

And my second thought was that, any time that resolutions come before this body to tinker with our bylaws, and particularly when they have the purpose to the lure somehow or restrict the participation of our members, we need to look at it with caution.

The fact that -- and as I listened to some of the debate, the debate was made, it was more like a bookkeeping entry because sometimes in the past we didn't have anything, sometimes we did. The -- our delegates, when they passed this resolution had concerns, and I'm not sure that those concerns have abated here today.

There's nothing wrong with getting our members more of a voice. The more we open up this organization to participation, whether it's through you, individually, as these delegates, or through you, members on the National Council, the stronger we are as an organization.

I encourage you and implore you, for the good of this organization and the long-term health, that you vote down this amendment, it is a bad idea.

Thank you, Comrade Commander-in-Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you.

Microphone 3.

COMRADE JUDD: Commander-in-Chief, Alecia Judd, VFW Post 5352, Department of North Carolina. And I would also like to second the motion on a roll call vote.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you. Microphone 2.

COMRADE SOUSA: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Dave Sousa from Department of Nevada, Post 3386 delegate.

My question is, and I'm going to probably need some clarification. If a commander at the post, district, and department, and the commander-in-chief appoint somebody, are we now going to require them to have a two-thirds of majority vote for them to accept that appointment?

That's what we're asking this organization to do.

In the past, like before last year, it was the commander-in-chief had a majority vote. I don't know why we're doing a two-thirds vote.

But if we do that with a commander-in-chief, are we going to require every level, the post, the district, and department to do a two-thirds vote for every appointment they have?

That's all I have, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 1.

COMRADE TRAXLER: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Erica Traxler, Department of Oklahoma, Post 5263. Thank you for your time today.

So it was mentioned yesterday in the committee that this was brought up by the commander-in-chief, and he has expertise that many of us do not have. But looking at it from my perspective, without his expertise, the adjutant's position is the most important position next to his in this entire organization.

It is also the most highly paid position in this organization. It is our responsibility to make sure that we, as a group, are making good choices. Our commander-in-chief is not perfect.

So then it falls on our Council of Administration to confirm that appointment.

What happens if they don't confirm that appointment? That means the answer is no. So that means that they don't think that that person that the commander-in-chief chose is correct, or, I mean, would be the right person for the position.

So do you want that to be done by a simple majority or would you expect that to be done by two-thirds vote? That's what we're looking at today.

Do we want to keep it two-thirds vote because we want to hold the National Council of Administration accountable for supporting our national commander, or do we want to have it be a simple majority? Please think about that before you vote. Thank you, comrade Commander-in-Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you, comrade.

Microphone 1.

COMRADE ROMINE: Chief, Ken Romine, Post 56 Kansas.

I have sat here and listened to everything, a lot of these said, I was part of the committee

yesterday. And I totally understand what everybody's saying, except that the point that the appointment actually comes from the highest paid position of the commander-in-chief, not the adjutant general.

616 says the commander-in-chief appoints. Then you move to 618, then it states that they can appoint off of a two-thirds vote. The commander-in-chief, as long as everybody else out here, has a vote. They get voted by a majority.

If the commander-in-chief is voted in by a majority vote, and his adjutant general now has a two-thirds vote to stay in, what we're offering there is a political asylum because then you do not have an appointment. You have an election because we know everybody gets a voice.

So if the National Council has a voice, then the majority votes should win. We're taking away the majority, our post, our departments, our national bylaws.

When you think about it, then you start taking away your vote.

So if the national office to be held by the adjutant general is an appointment, and if that's the highest job that people are saying, then we need to change the appointment or the position, not an appointment by the commander-in-chief.

And I think that's the -- what everybody's forgetting about. We're taking away people's votes if you don't recommend approval. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 3.

COMRADE WALTER: Barry Walter, delegate, Post 4005, Michigan. I rise in opposition to this bylaw amendment and I support a roll call vote.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you, comrade. Microphone 3.

COMRADE SAFFELL: Russ Saffell, delegate, Iowa, Post 9127. I also rise in opposition and support a roll call vote.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you, comrade. Microphone 3.

COMRADE BRIDGES: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Maurice Bridges, Post 4183, State Commander, Department of Illinois. I also rise in objection of this as well and request a roll call vote.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 1.

COMRADE PFEIFER: Commander-in-Chief, Kari Pfeifer, VFW Department of Ohio, State Commander, VFW Post 2920. I also asked for a roll call vote.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you, comrade. Microphone 2.

COMRADE MAHAN: Chief, Cory Mahan, Post 2714, Department of Indiana. I also request a roll call vote.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 1.

COMRADE TURNER: Chief, Mark Turner, Department State Commander for the --

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Yeah, sorry. Comrade, speak into the microphone.

COMRADE TURNER: Mark Turner, Department Commander, State of Rhode Island. I also support a roll call vote.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 2.

COMRADE HENRIKSEN: Commander-in-Chief, Barry Henriksen, Post 1782, White Bear Lake, Minnesota. It is an appointment. But as we talked about the financial, the -- I -- whoever talks about it, appointing your adjutant at your post, your adjutant at your post doesn't make over \$200,000.

And if we change the adjutant just because the commander-in-chief wants to come in, there are further financial ramifications. I'm not saying there's a big golden parachute, but it's more than just salary.

This is so important. Our council should be able to get two-thirds. And if we don't get that two-thirds, we've got the wrong person, we're not going to move forward. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 1.

COMRADE DEPONTEE: Commander-in-Chief, Rick Depontee, delegate vote from 4238 in Missouri. I also rise in opposition and I ask for a roll call vote.

Thank you, Commander.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 1.

COMRADE KEENE: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, John Keene, delegate, Post 1, Department of Colorado. I rise in support of this change back to a majority vote because I've heard, so far today, talk about consistency.

And as the department commander, it only took a majority of my council to – approve my appointment of my adjutant. And I'd also like to point out that this does not go beyond department because the post and the districts don't pay this position.

This is for a paid appointment, requires confirmation. And if we're going to be consistent, we should roll it back to 50 percent, a majority vote, to keep it consistent with what happens at the department level.

But I would also like to, if we don't already have it, make it ten motions for a roll call vote. Because I think no matter where you stand on this, your voice should be heard.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you, sir.

COMRADE KEENE: Thank you, comrade.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 1.

COMRADE COLLIER: Commander, Department of South Dakota, VFW State Commander Glynis Collier, and member of Post 2038 in Pierre, South Dakota. South Dakota also would like a roll call vote and we do oppose this motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 3.

COMRADE POTTS: Comrade Commander, Lonny Potts, 8530, South Dakota. I would like to call for a roll call vote also.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 3.

COMRADE ORGAN: Commander, Steve Organ, Department of Mississippi, Post 5395.

Call to question.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: The question has been called. It needs a second. Is there a second?

Nobody going to come with some, sort of -- I recognize Microphone 2.

COMRADE WISEMAN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Ken Wiseman, National Council Member, Department of Virginia. We've heard enough opposition. I second the motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: The question has been called and seconded. Standby by, we're going to do a roll call vote. We got to check this.

We got vote on -- comrades, going to give you ten minutes to caucus with your delegation.

Ten minutes, not 11. Not VFW ten minutes, you know what I mean?

Ten minutes. Question was called and it was seconded.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 14: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, point of order. Is it really necessary to do a roll --

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Comrade, real quick, stand by.

COMRADE LITTLE: Is it really necessary to do a roll call vote for the call for the question?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you, Ashley. All in favor of those calling for the question signify by saying aye.

AUDIENCE: Aye.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Opposed? Hearing crickets.

Ashley thank you for taking this out, brother.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Jim Weiser, Department of New Jersey, would you like to be a tallier? A tallier, we need somebody to tally the votes. Would you like-- Jim? Jim Weiser? All right. Max Mason, Department of -- in Pacific Areas. Max, would you like to be a tallier and count the votes?

Step forward.

Is that Larkin? Mark Larkin from North Carolina, come on and be a tallier.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Comrades, ten minutes is cut -- is ending.

Listen up. Just for clarity, a yes vote is for the change.

A no vote, keep the same. Are we clear? Yes vote, the change.
No vote, remains the same.
I'm going to turn this over to Adjutant General Dan West.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Good afternoon, comrades.
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: You're going to have to report whatever they vote. It's hard to hear. It's hard to hear back there.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Got it. All right.
Comrades, so the way this voting will work, I will call off the total delegate strength of our convention is 8,653 delegates.
According to the rules of parliamentary law, a simple majority is required to pass this vote or defeat it. That will be 4,384 delegate votes. That is 50 percent plus one.
Feel free to check me on your Google math phones, whatever.
Okay.
We'll start at the very top, per our convention rules.
Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento, you registered for your position.
How is your vote?
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Yes.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Senior Vice, you registered as a delegate.
National Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief, you registered for your position.
How is your vote?
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: No. Let me repeat that.
The chief voted yes. The junior vice voted no. Adjutant General registered as a delegate of his post.
Quartermaster General, you registered as an individual for your position. How is your vote? No?
QUARTERMASTER GENERAL GARDUNO: Yes.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Is -- the quartermaster is a yes vote. National Judge Advocate General, you registered as your position.
How do you vote?
JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL WHITAKER: No.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Judge Advocate General votes a no. National Surgeon General, you registered as the surgeon general. How do you vote?
SURGEON GENERAL BOHLMAN: No.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: He registers as a no vote. National Chaplain, you registered for your position. How do you vote?
CHAPLAIN FREI: No.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A no vote. National Chief of Staff Carey Pritchett, how do you vote?
CHIEF OF STAFF PRITCHETT: Yes.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Carey votes as a yes. National Inspector General Pete Mascetti, how do you vote?
INSPECTOR GENERAL MASCETTI: Yes.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Votes a yes. Past Commanders-in-Chief Edward Banas registered as a post delegate.
Tim Borland, you registered as a past chief. How do you vote?
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: No.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A no vote. Commander-in-Chief George Cramer registered as a post delegate. Richard DeNoyer registered as a post delegate. Past Commander-in-Chief Brian Duffy registered as a past chief. How is your vote?
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF DUFFY: No.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Brian Duffy is a no vote. Past Commander-in-Chief Richard Eubank registered as a past chief. How is your vote?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF EUBANK: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Past Commander-in-Chief Eubank registers as a no. Commander-in-Chief John Furgess registers as a post delegate. Commander-in-Chief Glen Gardner post delegate. Commander-in-Chief John – Past Commander-in-Chief John Hamilton, how do you vote?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HAMILTON: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: No vote. Past Commander-in-Chief Keith Harman, how do you vote?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HARMAN: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A no vote. Past Commander-in-Chief Vincent B.J. Lawrence, how do you vote?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: (No verbal response.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: No vote given. Past Commander-in-Chief John Moon, how do you vote?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF MOON: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: No vote. Past Commander-in-Chief James Nier, how do you vote?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF NIER: (No verbal response.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: No vote. Past Commander-in-Chief Thomas Pouliot, how do you vote?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF POULIOT: Yes.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A yes vote. Past Commander-in-Chief Larry Rivers, how do you vote?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: I think a Texan can decipher that Louisiana language as a no vote. Past Commander-in-Chief Harold Roesch, how do you vote?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ROESCH: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A no vote. Past Commander-in-Chief Doc Schmitz, how do you vote?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A no vote. Past Commander-in-Chief Paul Spera, how do you vote?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SPERA: Yes.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A yes vote. Past Commander-in-Chief John Stroud, how do you vote?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF STROUD: Hell no.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: I think that was a Nevada hell no. Past Commander-in-Chief Bill Thien registered as a post delegate. Past Commander-in-Chief Robert Wallace, how do you vote?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF WALLACE: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A no vote. Council Member from Alabama, Scott Gedling, you registered for your position. What is your vote?

COMRADE GEDLING: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A no vote. Council Member from Alaska, J.R. Hackett registered for your position. How is your vote?

COMRADE HACKETT: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A no vote. Council Member from Arizona, Lewis Wood, you registered as the council member. How is your vote?

COMRADE WOOD: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: No vote. Council Member from Arkansas, Donald Barnes registered as your position. How do you vote? Council Member Barnes, how do you vote? Is he here?

COMRADE BARNES: Yes.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: He votes a yes. Council Member from California, Dale Smith, registered as a post delegate. Council Member from Colorado, David Stone, registered as a post

delegate. Council Member from Connecticut, David Greene, how do you vote?

COMRADE GREENE: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: No vote. Council Member from Delaware, John Mitchell, how do you vote?

COMRADE MITCHELL: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Council Member from Europe, Pete Mascetti, you already cast your vote, right? No vote for Mascetti then. I mean, they -- he did not cast a vote.

It's -- Council Member from Florida, Ken Corr, how do you vote? Council Member from Florida, Ken Corr, how do you vote? Third time. Council Member from Florida, Ken Corr, how do you vote? Not present.

Council Member from Georgia, Jeff Carroll registered as a post delegate. Council member from Hawaii, Norbert Enos, how do you vote?

COMRADE ENOS: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: No vote, correct? Idaho -- Council Member from Idaho, Rocky Davis, how do you vote?

COMRADE DAVIS: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: No vote. Council Member from Illinois, Matthew Claussen, how do you vote?

COMRADE CLAUSSEN: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: No vote. Council Member from Indiana, Johnny Capps, how do you vote?

COMRADE CAPPS: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Council Member from Iowa, Michael Braman, how do you vote?

COMRADE BRAMAN: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A no vote. Council Member from Kansas, Patrick Briggs, how do you vote?

COMRADE BRIGGS: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A no vote. Council Member from Kentucky, Robert Daugherty, how do you vote? A no vote? I see you there, Robert. No vote for Robert Daugherty.

Council Member from Louisiana, Big Sexy, Robert J. Lovergne. Council Member from Louisiana, Robert Lovergne, how do you vote? Council Member from Louisiana, Robert Lovergne, how do you vote? Not voting or not present.

Council Member from Maine, Steven SanPedro, how do you vote?

COMRADE SANPEDRO: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: No vote. Council Member from Maryland, Denise Perry, how do you vote? Council member for Maryland, Denise Perry, how do you vote? Council Member for Maryland, Denise Perry, how do you vote? Not present or not voting.

Council Member from Massachusetts, Eric Segundo, how do you vote?

COMRADE SEGUNDO: No. No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A no vote. Council Member from Michigan, Kevin Conklin, how do you vote? Council Member from Michigan, Kevin Conklin, how do you vote? Council Member from Michigan, Kevin Conklin, how do you vote? Not present or not voting.

Council Member from Minnesota, Dale Hoogeveen registered as a post delegate. Council Member from Mississippi, Steven Organ, how do you vote?

COMRADE ORGAN: Yes.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Yes vote. Council Member from Missouri, Eric D. Sullivan, how do you vote? Council Member from Missouri, Eric Sullivan, how do you vote? Council Member from Missouri, Eric Sullivan, how do you vote? Not present or not voting.

Council Member from Montana, Jack Hawley, how do you vote?

COMRADE HAWLEY: Yes.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Yes?

COMRADE HAWLEY: Yes.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: That is a yes vote. Council Member from Nebraska, Joe Smith, how do you vote?

COMRADE SMITH: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: No vote. Council member from Nevada, Gerald Peterson, how do you vote?

COMRADE PETERSON: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: No vote. Council Member from New Hampshire, Leon Rideout, how do you vote?

COMRADE RIDEOUT: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: No vote. Council Member from New Jersey, Bill Thompson, registered as a delegate, but he's also not here.

Council Member from New Mexico, Lenwood Hampton, how do you vote?

COMRADE HAMPTON: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: No vote. Council Member from New York, Gene Ratigliano, how do you vote? Council Member from New York, Gene Ratigliano, how do you vote? Council Member from New York, Gene Ratigliano, how do you vote? Not present or not voting.

Council Member from North Carolina, Greg Stafford, how do you vote?

COMRADE STAFFORD: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: No vote. Council member from North Dakota, Bill Tuff, registered as a post delegate. Council Member of Ohio, Chris Haynes, how do you vote?

COMRADE HAYNES: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A no vote. Council Member from Oklahoma, Kirk Watts, how do you vote?

COMRADE WATTS: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: No vote. Council Member from Oregon, George Carroll, how do you vote?

COMRADE CARROLL: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Council Member from the Pacific Areas, Ken Stein, how do you vote? Council Member from Pacific, Ken Stein, how do you vote? Council member from the Pacific, Ken Stein, how do you vote? Not present or not voting.

Council member of Pennsylvania, Glenn Umberger, how do you vote?

COMRADE UMBERGER: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A no vote. Council Member of Rhode Island, Eric Dukat, how do you vote?

COMRADE DUKAT: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A no vote. Council Member of South Carolina, Ted Tufts, how do you vote?

COMRADE TUFTS: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A no vote. Council Member of South Dakota, Barbara McKean, how do you vote?

COMRADE MCKEAN: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A no vote. Council Member of Tennessee, Brian Walker, how do you vote? Council Member of Tennessee, Brian Walker, how do you vote? Council Member of Tennessee, Brian Walker, how do you vote? Not present or not voting.

Council Member of Texas, Inge Conley, how do you vote?

COMRADE CONLEY: No.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A no vote. Council Member of Utah, Denise Parizek -- I'm sorry. Dennis Parizek. Sorry, Dennis.

COMRADE PARIZEK: No.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A no vote. Council Member of Vermont, Charles Magnant, how do you vote?
 COMRADE MAGNANT: No.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A no vote. Council Member of Virginia, Kenneth Wiseman, how do you vote?
 COMRADE WISEMAN: No.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: No vote. Council Member of Washington, Frederick Green, how do you vote?
 COMRADE GREEN: Yes.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Yes?
 COMRADE GREEN: Yes.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Thank you. Council Member of West Virginia, Thomas Anderson, not present. Council Member of Wisconsin, Cory Geisler, how do you vote?
 COMRADE GEISLER: No.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: No vote. Council Member of Wyoming, Rodney Birkle, how do you vote?
 COMRADE BIRKLE: No.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: A no vote. All right.
 Let's have some fun. I want to greatly appreciate all of you for the opportunity to do something I've only seen done once in my 29 years of history, and that's a roll call vote at the national convention. I'm going to ask all of the departments to line up at your microphones in alphabetical order. We all know Alabama's going to vote first, right? All right. Let's get started. Alabama, you have a vote and strength of 115. How do they vote?
 ALABAMA: All 115 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 115 no. Alaska, you have a total strength of 130. How do they vote?
 ALASKA: 130 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 130 no. Arizona, you have a total strength of 314. How do they vote?
 ARIZONA: 314 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 314 no. Arkansas, you have a total of 180 votes. How do they vote?
 ARKANSAS: Unanimous yes.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 180 yes.
 For the Department of California, you have 220 votes. How do they vote?
 CALIFORNIA: 114 yes. 105 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 114 yes. And how much for no?
 CALIFORNIA: 105.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 105 no.
 For the Department of Colorado, you have 138 total votes. How do they vote?
 COLORADO: All yes.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 138 yes.
 The Department of Connecticut, you have 100 votes total. How do they vote?
 CONNECTICUT: 100 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 100 no.
 For the Department of Delaware, you have 81 votes. How do they vote?
 DELAWARE: 81 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 81 no.
 For the Department of Europe, you have 352 votes. How do they vote?

EUROPE: 180 -- 168 yes. 186 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 168 yes and 186 no.
 EUROPE: Correct.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: I'm sure somebody will correct me if my dyslexia gets in the way.
 The Department of Florida has 311 votes. How do they vote?
 FLORIDA: 311 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 311 no.
 The Department of Georgia has 224 votes. How do they vote?
 GEORGIA: 241 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: You said -- did you say 241?
 GEORGIA: That's what you said, didn't you?
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: No. You got 224.
 GEORGIA: All right. Stand corrected. 224 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 224 no. I appreciate you for trying. I am dyslexic. Almost -- you almost got away with it.
 GEORGIA: Thank you.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Department of Hawaii has 80 total votes. How do they vote?
 HAWAII: Department of Hawaii Votes all 80 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: All 80 no.
 The Department of Idaho has 74 votes. How do they vote?
 IDAHO: Department of Idaho votes 2 yes. 72 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 2 yes, and 72 no.
 Tough decision there, right?
 Department of Illinois has 272 votes. How do they vote?
 ILLINOIS: 11 yes. 261 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 11 yes. 261 no.
 Department of Indiana has 239 votes. How do they vote?
 INDIANA: 239 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 239 no.
 The Department of Iowa has 47 votes. How do they vote?
 KANSAS: We vote no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: All 47?
 KANSAS: All 47.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 47 votes no.
 For the Department of Kansas, you have 230 votes. How do they vote?
 KANSAS: 1 yes. 230 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: So 229 no and 1 yes. You have a total of 230. Is that right? Where you at, Kansas? Come back up.
 KANSAS: That's correct.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: That's correct. All right. 1 yes and 229 no. I can do math. I can only do up to five though, so --
 Department of Kentucky has a total of 224 votes. How do they vote?
 KENTUCKY: 224 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 224 no.
 The Department of Louisiana has 129 votes. How do they vote?
 LOUISIANA: 129 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 129 no.
 The Department of Maine has 91 votes. How do they vote?
 MAINE: Department of Maine, 91 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 91 no.

The Department of Maryland has 220 votes. How do they vote?
MARYLAND: 24 yes. 195 no.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 24 yes and 195 no.
I don't think that comes up to 220. We'll let it stand unless it's -- you're missing one vote. You have 220 registered delegates. 24 –
MARYLAND: Okay. So my sheet had 219 on it. That's why we were short one. So it's 196 no. 24 yes.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 196 no. 24 yes.
Department of Massachusetts has 107 votes. How do they vote?
MASSACHUSETTS: 107 no.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 107 no. Department of Michigan has 178 votes. How do they vote?
MICHIGAN: Department of Michigan votes 178 no votes.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 178 no. The Department of Minnesota has 134 votes. How do they vote?
MINNESOTA: 134 no and point of order.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 134 no, and a point of order. I don't do points of order. That would have be the Commander-in-Chief. What -- he's got a point of order. I don't know what it is.
MINNESOTA: All right.
COMRADE STAEHLIN: I'm Commander-in-Chief David Staehlin, State Commander, Minnesota. Unless I'm mistaken, I believe the Adjutant General said this requires a majority vote. This is an amendment to the by-laws for two-thirds vote.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: It's been corrected.
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: That's been corrected, comrades. Thanks for pointing that out.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Just real fast, it's been -- our National Parliamentarian informed me that I actually made a mistake because I'm dyslexic. This requires a two-thirds vote that we're voting on a two-thirds vote. Everybody see the irony?
They told me they would get me what that delegate count is for two-thirds, all right? So – all right.
Department of Mississippi, you have 118 votes. How do they vote?
MISSISSIPPI: 118 no.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 118 votes no.
Department of Missouri, 246 votes. How do they vote?
MISSOURI: All 246 no.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 246 no.
The Department of Montana has 73 votes. How do they vote?
MONTANA: 73 votes yes.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 73 yes.
The Department of Nebraska has 124 votes. How do they vote?
NEBRASKA: Department of Nebraska votes all no.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 124 no.
The Department of Nevada has 117 votes. How do they vote?
NEVADA: The Department of Nevada, 117 votes no.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 117 no.
Department of New Hampshire has 38 votes. How do they vote?
NEW HAMPSHIRE: Department of New Hampshire, all 38 no.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: All 38 no.
The Department of New Jersey has 132 votes. How do they vote?
NEW JERSEY: 112 yes. 20 no.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 112 yes and 20 no.
 Department of New Mexico has 116 votes. How do they vote?
 NEW MEXICO: Department of New Mexico, 116 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 116 no.
 The Department of New York has 137 votes. How do they vote?
 NEW YORK: 137 votes no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 137 no.
 The Department of North Carolina has 169 votes. How do they vote?
 NORTH CAROLINA: 169 votes no for North Carolina.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 169 no.
 The Department of North Dakota has 39 votes. How do they vote?
 NORTH DAKOTA: Department of North Dakota, 39 votes no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 39 votes no.
 The Department of Ohio has 302 votes. How do they vote?
 OHIO: The Department of Ohio, 302 votes no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 302 no.
 The Department of Oklahoma has 90 votes. How do they vote?
 OKLAHOMA: Department of Oklahoma, 90 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 90 for no.
 The Department of Oregon has 88 votes. How do they vote?
 OREGON: All votes no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 88 votes for no.
 Department of the Pacific Areas has 240 votes. How do they vote?
 PACIFIC AREAS: Chairman Adjutant General, the sheet I have in front of me says I have 239. I'll take the 40.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: You have 240. 239 registered delegates, and then you have one department officer.
 PACIFIC AREAS: Very well. Department of Pacific Areas votes 240 no, and woo.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 240 no.
 Department of Pennsylvania, you have 252 votes. How do you vote?
 PENNSYLVANIA: Department of Pennsylvania votes 252 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 252 no.
 Department of Rhode Island has 26 votes. How do they vote?
 RHODE ISLAND: The Department of Rhode Island votes 6 yes, 20 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 6 yes and 20 no. Thank you.
 Department of South Carolina has 231 votes. How do they vote?
 SOUTH CAROLINA: 231 no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 231 no.
 The Department of South Dakota has 53 votes. How do they vote?
 SOUTH DAKOTA: 53 votes, no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 53 no.
 The Department of Tennessee has 132 votes. How do they vote?
 TENNESSEE: Department of Tennessee, all 132 votes no.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 132 no.
 The Department of Texas has 575 votes. Really?
 TEXAS: Department of Texas has 402 on the floor. 359 no. 43 yes.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: You're complicating things because that's not in our rules.
 TEXAS: That's right.
 ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: You have 575 votes. How many are yes and how many are no?
 TEXAS: The commanders weren't here. Right? I'll go back and recalculate.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: I think your peers just told you if they weren't here then they're still voting. How many yes? How many no? And I guess how many you want to not vote?

TEXAS: Yeah. 530 --

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: All right. Texas, take your ass to the back of the room and figure it out.

TEXAS: 531 no. 43 yes.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: All right. Say that again?

TEXAS: 531 no.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 531 no.

TEXAS: 43 yes.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 43 yes. Thank you very much. I appreciate your cooperation.

TEXAS: Life is good.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: You may find your seat back there. Had to be my home state, too.

Department of Utah has 63 votes. How do they vote? Where's Utah at?

UTAH: Department of Utah, 12 yes, 50 no.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: All right. Department of Utah has 12 yes and the 50 no. You're missing one.

Vermont. Department of Vermont, you have 55 votes.

VERMONT: Department of Vermont, 54 no.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 54 no. You're missing a vote, too. You got a total of 55.

VERMONT: 55 no.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 55 no. All right. Now, you can applaud that. That one vote's probably going to break the bank there, so --

Department of Virginia, you have 493 votes. How do they vote?

VIRGINIA: Department of Virginia all 493 vote no.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 493 no.

Department of Washington has 219 votes. How do they vote?

WASHINGTON: It says 218. Department of Washington. 17 yes, 201 no. And ours says 218.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Yeah, you have a total voting strength of 219.

WASHINGTON: 202 --

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: How many are --

WASHINGTON: 202 no.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 202 no. How many yes?

WASHINGTON: 17.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 15. You say 15 or 16? 15. 15 yes, 202 no for the Department of Washington.

West Virginia has 170 votes. How do they vote?

WEST VIRGINIA: Department of West Virginia, 170 votes no.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 170 no.

Department of Wisconsin has 178 votes. How do they vote?

WISCONSIN: Wisconsin, all votes no.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 178 votes no.

The Department of Wyoming has 33 votes. How do they vote?

WYOMING: Wyoming, all votes no.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: 33 votes no. Comrades, I'm going to ask your patience while the tally committee figures this out and gives the results to Commander-in-Chief. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Give everybody credit on their math skills. That's for sure. Except for a few yous. See any -- I didn't see any shoes off, so we did good.
(OFF THE RECORD)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Comrades, while we're waiting here, listen up, please. Hey, we got workshops scheduled for 4:00. We built -- this is the first committee. We're going to put -- for now, we're going to push those workshops to 5:00.

If we go much later, we'll have to reevaluate at that time whether we cancel or move forward, okay? Make sense? I don't want nobody getting up, going, "I got to go to a workshop." I mean, all the -- everybody is here for that.

So let's see. We're going to push them workshops to 5:00 that were scheduled for 4:00. What's that do to -- what time does cornhole start? Wait. And how long is corn -- oh, cornhole? Wait. And how long are the workshops?

Not everybody is playing cornhole. The workshops were originally scheduled for 90 minutes as it was. So if you were going to play cornhole at 5:00 and had a workshop at 4:00, you weren't getting out of there 5:30 anyway. But we'll just -- you'll have to make your personal preference if you want to -- you know, if you're in the cornhole tournament or you're going to a workshop.

That's all. Look, let's not test the math again. I think we got -- we got by goodness this time. Everybody had to write numbers. We got a marine back there, counting. There's smoke coming out of his ears. Larkin looks like he's on fire.

Comrades, stop.

Come on.

We're running late. Fucking -- on the motions.

We're on the vote. 909, yes. 7,852, no.

The motion does not -- does -- does -- it -- to adopt does not pass. It has failed. Next.

Past Commander-in-Chief B.J. Lawrence, back to you.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 18: I can't hear you.

CHAIRMAN LAWRENCE: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief. Now I will read the proposed Congressional Charter and bylaw amendments that the Committee rejected, which will die unless a motion is made for adoption. I like that.

Commander-in-Chief, the Committee rejected the following proposed bylaw amendments: B-4, B-6, B-7, B-8, B-9, B-10, B-11, B-12, B-13, B-14, B-17, B-18, B-19, and B-20.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Are there any motions to adopt these proposed amendments? Hearing and seeing none, they die.

CHAIRMAN LAWRENCE: He's got jokes. He said, you done? No. I will now read the proposed amendment to the Manual of Procedure the Committee recommended for adoption.

Commander-in-Chief, the proposed amendment is M-2.

Commander-in-Chief, in keeping with the rules of this convention, I move this proposed amendment is adopted, M-2.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Is there a set-aside? We have a motion out of Committee. Any questions on the motion? Any questions on the motion?

All those in favor, say goodbye by saying aye.

AUDIENCE: Aye.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Opposed? Approved.

CHAIRMAN LAWRENCE: Thank you.

I'll now 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: M-4, M-5, M-7, M-8, M-9, M-10, M-11, M-12, M-13, and M-14.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Is there a motion to adopt any of these proposed amendments? Hearing and seeing none, they die.

CHAIRMAN LAWRENCE: I'll now read the proposed amendment to the ritual that the Committee recommended for adoption.

Commander-in-Chief, this proposed amendment is R-1. Commander-in-Chief, in keeping with the

rules of this convention, I move this proposed amendment is adopted, R-1.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Is there a set-aside? You have a motion out of Committee. Doesn't require a second.

Any questions on the motion? Any questions on the motion? All those in favor, signify it by saying aye.

AUDIENCE: Aye.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Opposed? Passed.

CHAIRMAN LAWRENCE: I'll now read the proposed ritual amendments the Committee recommended reject -- are rejected, which will die unless a motion is made for adoption.

Commander-in-Chief, the Committee rejected the following proposed ritual amendments, R-2, R-3, and R-4.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Is there a motion to adopt these proposed amendments? Hearing and seeing none, they die.

CHAIRMAN LAWRENCE: Here's the best part, comrades.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, this concludes my report and the work of this committee.

On behalf of myself and Vice Chairman Spera and all our members, we thank you for your confidence placed in this committee to administer the affairs.

Thank you to all the committee members for your hard work and members of staff for their assistance. Comrade Commander-in-Chief, thank you for the appointment.

COMMITTEE REPORT: FINANCE AND INTERNAL ORGANIZATION
BY PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF JOHN MOON, CHAIRMAN

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Well, now this next one is a toughie. No, I'm just kidding. And we have a report on Committee in Finance and Internal Organization by Past Commander-in-Chief John Moon.

CHAIRMAN MOON: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief. Comrades, I am pleased to report that the Committee on Finance and Internal Organization met Sunday afternoon at 1400 hours in Hall D and discussed the items before the committee.

The proposed resolutions were distributed to each department and posted online. These resolutions contained, in the booklet that you received at registration, plus each member of the committee received an additional book -- booklet at our meeting.

Commander-in-Chief, with your permission, I will begin the committee report by presenting those resolutions the committee recommends for adoption and then proceed to those that were recommended for rejection.

Resolution number 204, amendment to Section 230103 of the Congressional Charter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. Comrade Commander, I move to accept the committee's recommendation to approve this resolution.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We have a motion to adopt. Doesn't require a second. Is there any questions on the motion? Oh, withdraw?

I'm-- I apologize. Is there any set-asides? Microphone 3, is there any set-asides?

COMRADE JUAREZ: Stuart Juarez, the department quartermaster for the State of Iowa - Department of Iowa, moves to set aside that motion for discussion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: It's been set aside.

Microphone 1.

COMRADE SMITH: Dale Smith, Post 3783, Department of California. I move to accept 203 -- adopt 203.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Comrade, we're only taking set-asides now, Dale. We're not -- we're not at that point yet. Comrades, I see a lot of -- microphone number -- I'm trying to move back and forth.

Does everybody want this set-aside? I mean, if you're up here, we got it. It's already here, so I just wanted to make sure.

Microphone number 2, go ahead.

COMRDE STEWART: Point of order.

I guess, isn't it, since it was moved and it's a second – it doesn't require a second, it would go to discussion, correct?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: They -- I jumped the gun. They set it aside. We -- we're still -- we're going to have discussion on it. You know what I mean?

COMRADE STEWART: Yeah. I'll wait -- I'll wait for discussion, then.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I got you.

Discussion, microphone 1?

Discussion, microphone 2?

COMRADE HACKETT: Johnathan Hackett, Post 9365, Department of Alaska.

I stand in opposition to this resolution.

The reason I stand in opposition to it is I understand that there's membership and we need to come up with a way to strengthen our ranks, and I'm not opposed to that, but I think to allow people to -- yes, they may have been, during the Cold War, in what we called the front line, that front line, although there were weapons on the other side and weapons on this side, it was -- it's not the same as dodging round.

It's not the same as being in combat. And we're a veterans of foreign wars organization, and I strongly believe that we should keep it that way.

And it was discussed yesterday in Committee that, under our charter of 501(c), that as a war organization, if you fall below a certain percentage of that body not being war-related, then your contributions that you receive or donations would no longer be able to be written off in IRS taxes when it comes to the people who are making those contributions.

I'm strongly opposed to this because I feel that the difference in being on a front line in that type of a situation, when there wasn't a declaration of war, and being in true combat are truly significant.

I now yield.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you. Microphone number 1.

COMRADE AGUIAR: Commander Marty Aguiar, Post 10054, Department of Nevada.

I stand in approval of this. Give me one second. I got to -- I have this all typed up. Sorry.

Well, it was an important change that the eligibility rules would allow all veterans who served during the -- overseas during the Cold War from March until -- well, from 1945 to 1991 to join the veterans of foreign wars.

These veterans played in -- a crucial role in maintaining global stability and deserve recognition for their service, strategic importance, and constant readiness during the Cold War. U.S. military personnel stationed in Asia, Africa, and Europe were vital to deterring the spread of communism and maintaining peace.

These veterans operated on the front lines of an ideological, political, and, at times, physical confrontations, requiring constant vigilance and readiness. Their contributions were essential to our nation's security and the defense of democratic values.

They were exposed to hostile environments, although direct conflict was not always involved, many Cold War veterans stationed overseas faced significant threats, including espionage, proxy wars, and political instabilities.

U.S. forces in Europe, for instance, dealt with the threat of the Soviet aggression, while those in Asia were involved with the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. In Africa, they navigated regional conflicts and groups.

The environments they served demanded the same level of bravery, resilience, and dedication as traditional combat zones. Veterans of the Cold War was substantial. They faced the constant threats of nuclear war, needed to be ready for rapid response to crisis, and endured prolonged separation from

family.

Recognize their service. Acknowledge those comprehensive sacrifices they make, which were akin to those veterans of more conventional combat roles. The VFW already includes veterans who served in support roles in various conflicts, recognized that military service encompasses a range of duties beyond direct combat.

For example, veterans stationed in Korea who were part of a crucial strategic presence during the Cold War and should have been allowed to join the VFW. This inclusion sets a precedence that supports the recognition of all Cold War veterans who served overseas, emphasizing the value of their diverse and essential roles in maintaining global security.

This alignment with the VFW's mission includes fostering comradery among U.S. veterans and overseas conflicts and ensuring they receive due recognition and support, including Cold War era veterans aligned with the missions, by acknowledging their pivotal role in this significant period of U.S. military's history.

Their inclusion would enrich the VFW with diverse experience, perspective, foster a broader understanding of military service.

That's all I have.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you, Comrade.

Before -- comrades, if you're speaking on just this resolution, I asked you to come forward to the mic. If you're speaking on a later resolution, kind of just -- you will get your chance.

Ain't like we're going to rush this and you don't get your chance. That way, it's not confusing and who's waiting, which microphone.

Thank you. Microphone number 3.

COMRADE SAFFELL: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Russ Saffell, Iowa, Post 9127.

So I agree with the gentleman over there, and I would never discount any -- anyone's military service. However, that does not change the definition and law of what a combat veteran is, what a war veteran is.

In the State of Iowa, we have provisions where only organizations comprised wholly, 100 percent, of combat veterans that get property tax abatement.

That is -- that is 20 other states that have the same exact issue. So we were -- we're talking about issues where this vote could change the implications in your state, or if you want me, as the state adjutant, to go back and tell every single one of my 113 posts they now have to pay property tax because we voted to allow non-combat veterans into our organization, no thank you.

That's all.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 2.

COMRADE DAVIS: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Jim Davis, Department of Georgia, Post 12002. Chief, I rise to support this motion.

I was in the committee. I believe there's some simple facts that we need to consider and I would like to share with you three personal experiences.

Number one, in the spirit of Occam's Razor, the well-accepted phrase here is Cold War. Let me emphasize that again. Cold War. I believe the operative word is war.

When you go to war, then you are subject to hostile environment, you're subject -- you are in harm's way. Secondly, in our congressional charter, there is the phrase "in hostile waters." It may be that the legislature would find it appropriate to add hostile lands in addition.

Thirdly, I have a fraternity brother who was in the -- weapons officer in a Los Angeles-class attack submarine. At a homecoming celebration before the homecoming game at Georgia Tech, he had a few too many beers.

Someone in the group brought up the discussion of, wow, I was really, really afraid. With his head down, he muttered, "You have not known fear until you have been on the bottom of the harbor of Vladivostok."

And I said to him, what did you say? And he said, "B.J., I didn't say anything. I didn't say

anything." Didn't know what he meant until I read the book *Blind Man's Bluff*, and I recommend that you all read that, of submarine warfare during the Cold War.

And it turns out, that we sent fast attack subs into the harbors of Russia, with nuclear chemists embarked on board to check the waters coming down that river for a nucleotides so they could determine was that nuclear reactor just making power or was it making plutonium. And I suggest to all the members here that my fraternity brother and everyone else on that Los Angeles attack-class sub was in harm's way.

Secondly, I worked with a young man who was a recon platoon leader for a mechanized infantry company deployed in Germany, again, in the 1990s. Every week -- one week of every month, his recon platoon sat at the terminus of the Fulda Gap.

And quite often, the Russians would send 100 or more tanks screaming down the gap, and they had no idea whatsoever if this was simply an exercise to gather ELINT on our signals operating procedures or if it was the real deal. Because if it had been the real deal, they estimated they would last 15 minutes. They were there to be a speed bump and they would all die.

And I suggest to you that they deserve recognition for being functionally in combat. Thank you very much, Commander-in-Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 2.

COMRADE JOYCE: Chief, James Joyce, Post 10692 at the Department of Europe. I stand before you all as a Gulf -- or as a Gulf War veteran. I earned my eligibility over there in Desert Storm.

Prior to that -- thank you. Thank you.

Prior to that, I was a Cold War veteran. I can swear on that Bible right in front of me right there that the fear I had as a Cold War veteran was 1,000 times more than the fear that I had as a Gulf War veteran -- as a Gulf -- or serving in the Gulf War.

The opponent that we had during the Cold War was much more formidable than any opponent we had over in the Gulf War.

We had nuclear weapons pointed at us. We had nuclear weapons in Germany that we were there to protect, maintain, and have it -- have ready to use. When I came over to Germany, it was my first duty station.

I was brought over there as an OH-58 aerial scout observer. I flew in one of those little tiny helicopters with no weapons, and my mission was to fly border surveillance along the Czech-German border. There were times when I was in that little tiny helicopter, looking across the border with a fully loaded HEYM pointing right at me.

That fear was never felt over in Desert Storm.

So contrary to what I heard in the committee -- and I was in the committee. Contrary to what I heard in that committee, we weren't over there just drinking Bavarian beer, or drinking bourbon by the way of Kentucky, but we weren't just over there playing. We weren't just over there having fun.

There's a lot of similarities between the Cold War veterans and the Korean veterans of today. I'm talking about the Korean veterans from the -- you know, '57 on, after the armistice was signed. I keep hearing, hey, Korea is still at war. There's a big difference. Korea is not at war.

That armistice ended the war. They may not have ever signed a peace accord, but the war is over. The fear over there in the Korean Peninsula has got to be the same fear that the Cold War veterans are feeling. You have the armory pointing right at you. You're sitting there at the .38 -- .38 pistol and six bullets in your -- in your pocket as your defense.

I -- I have to stand with the weight of 22 million Cold War veterans still alive that need to be recognized and I need the VFW to stand up for them. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Okay. Microphone 1.

COMRADE RIVERS: Commander-in-Chief, my name is Larry Rivers. I'm a past commander-in-chief of the VFW, and I think maybe a little institutional knowledge may be helpful to us on this debate.

You know, over the years -- and I used to say many of you, but now I'll say some of you, since

us Vietnam vets are getting a lot older.

Many of us have had the same debate for years over the National Defense Service Ribbon. And we used to have -- when the World War vets were still alive in huge numbers and the Vietnam vets were younger, we would have these huge debates about whether National Defense Service Ribbons should be eligible for the VFW.

We've heard these same kind of debates. World War II veterans in overwhelming numbers opposed it. Vietnam veterans in overwhelming numbers opposed it. Now we have a new generation of veterans that are now going to deal with this same question. And let me just tell you a little bit about the history of the VFW.

And excuse me because many of you know this already. You know, when we were founded, we were called the Veterans of Foreign Service. And somewhere along the way, the ones that founded this great organization and built it, a foundation on which we could grow to where we are now, decided that we were not the veterans of foreign service.

We were the veterans of foreign wars. That doesn't disparage anybody else's service. Anybody that's worn the uniform of this country deserves our respect and admiration. That does not mean they deserve membership in the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

I'm a marine. I was a platoon commander and a company commander in the infantry in Vietnam, had marines wounded and had marines died.

By the grace of God, I didn't get wounded.

Many of you carry the Purple Heart for wounds you received in battle. You have an organization called the Military Order of the Purple Heart. I can't come to you and say, look, I didn't get wounded, but I was close and I got shot at and I may have been wounded, had they not missed, so can I be a member of the Military Order of the Purple Heart? You would laugh me out of the room.

You would. If we -- if we are going to go down this slippery slope of membership and change who we are, there's an old adage I think we need to remember, and that's this: before you start down that road, you need to decide where you're going.

So where are we going?

Are we changing the nature and the flavor of the VFW to where we're not seeing these combat veterans? Our brand is the strongest among veterans organizations in this country. When our fellow American citizens see VFW, they think of combat veterans.

That doesn't disparage any service of our other fellow veterans at all. If we are going to change who we are, then who are we trying to become? We were designed, once we changed our name to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, to be a last-man organization.

And even though I'm approaching 80 years old, I hope the last one of you that is still alive, that has earned eligibility in this organization, turns out the lights and says, God bless America.

This is wrong for the organization.

It's not the time for this. I urge you to reject this resolution and to keep this organization what we know and love, an organization of combat veterans. Thank you, Commander-in-Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 3.

COMRADE KRAMER: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Dan Kramer, Post 8258, Department of Nebraska.

I -- if I'm not mistaken, we have ways of getting some of those folks in the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Did we not okay a deal to a -- if they received hazardous duty pay, they can belong? Is that not correct?

I see no reason to, like the comrade said, change who we are and call it recognition. If we want recognition for these folks, have them stand up, we'll give them a round of applause. I have no problem with that.

That's recognizing them.

But to allow them into a combat organization when they were not in combat, that I do have a problem with. And I'm not saying that they weren't more scared than I was when I was in combat.

Who knows? I can't argue that with them.

What I am saying is they were not there, in the right place, at the right time, to belong to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 2.

COMRADE NAIL: Commander-in-Chief, Jim Nail, Post 5789, Missouri.

I rise in opposition.

This is personal.

My wife was a spook stationed in Okinawa and it irritates her to this day that I am eligible and she is not.

However, this resolution, as written, is simply too broad.

While I do agree there are specific types of duties in specific locations that might need to be examined to include the entire continents of Europe, Africa, and Asia simply does not meet the standard of this organization. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 3.

COMRADE PETERS: Commander-in-Chief, Derek Peters, 477, Department of Pennsylvania.

The VFW is in the elite club of combat veterans, where, like me, we were out and got shot in the face and I got blown up. I'm Sorry.

If they want to come in and be a part of somebody, they can go to the Legion where they're more than welcome, but the threat of anything should not qualify where the action of combat puts us separate.

I'm trying to be careful with my words, so excuse me.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: You -- you're doing good.

COMRADE PETERS: I'm going to leave it there because then I'm going to get pissed.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 1.

COMRADE TRAXLER: Comrade Commander in Chief, Erica Traxler, Post 5263, Department of Oklahoma.

Are we not the greatest combat veteran organization in the world?

Keyword, combat.

If you have not been in combat, you cannot be in this organization. If you have not earned the right to be in this organization, we should not allow you to be in this organization. Hostile fire pay does allow you to be in this organization. Does everybody get it? No.

But if you are in a hostile environment, you would get it. So why on Earth would we allow people to be in this organization who have not earned it? Think about that.

Thank you, Comrade Commander-in-Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 3.

COMRADE JUAREZ: Stuart Juarez, Post 738, Department of Iowa, Quartermaster for the department as well.

I stand -- in fact, this is not the way to get them into this organization.

We should petition Congress for those that saw a hostile environment to get their expeditionary medals, we should petition to get them their -- find their records for hostile pay. They could then earn their right to be in this organization.

We are not changing our bylaws or our charter, or asking Congress to change our charter, to change who we are. We are not the Legion and when Iowa did that and changed their little thing, they ended up paying property taxes, they ended up paying -- we are gathered as combat veterans, the issues that we're trying to do here with this resolution is change our charter.

The things that actually, if you read, it asks us to ask Congress to change our charter, negative. Stay where we are, let's give them the opportunities to prove that they deserve to be in this organization with getting their hazard pay, getting their hostile fire pay, imminent danger, whatever they need to prove.

That's where we should go with this, not to change our charter and who we are. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 2.

COMRADE SOUSA: Commander in Chief, Dave Sousa from the Department of Nevada Post 3396 delegate.

I want to correct one of our comrades there. It's not hazardous duty, it's hostile fire and imminent danger pay that is allowed in Section 101 of our charter. If you guys take a look at it, it says, "Any foreign war, insurrection, or expedition what service is recognized by the award of a campaign or service medal of the United States."

I can read the rest, but the Department of Defense, the Department of Army has not authorized a Cold War medal. They have not authorized -- they have only given an honorable service certificate for the Cold War. So I stand in opposition of this. We are a combat veterans' organization in that we should live by our bylaws.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 2.

COMRADE MARIANO: Commander, this is Len Mariano, VFW Post 8616, Department of Hawaii.

I rise in opposition of this amendment for several reasons. First, what everyone else has said to reference hazardous duty, hostile pay. Second, I was a Cold War veteran as well. Third, if we were to change this, we would have to change our organization and the way we think and the way we move.

So what I suggest is that we reject this and we have it so that we keep the VFW as a premier combat fighting organization. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 1.

COMRADE NASCIO: Commander in Chief, my name is Emmanuel Nascio (phonetic), delegate, Post 9896, Department of California.

I come to you as a frontline combat infantry soldier, I also come to you as a peacekeeping soldier, and I also come to you as a soldier that's gone to Ukraine to train those men for war.

And I stand in support of this -- of this resolution, and here's why. I define combat probably differently than a lot of other people define combat. To me, combat is you're actively engaged with the enemy. I've been on peacekeeping missions where I'm helping keep the peace, and I've been on training missions where I've trained men and women for war.

What is the difference?

Do we not allow -- I got my eligibility from being on a peacekeeping mission because they gave me a darn medal that I didn't even want. I got my eligibility from being in combat in Iraq. So we allow people in Korea who get the Korean Service Medal, but they've never fired a round.

But these men and women in the Cold War, and you can't tell me they were not stressed out, they weren't afraid for their lives. You can't tell me that they weren't scared because I was sitting there in Ukraine, scared off my butt, watching people come back in body bags, but yet I'd never fired a round.

But does that not make me a veteran? Is it just because I was in Iraq or is it just because I guarded patriot missiles in Kuwait? What -- how do we define a veteran? How do we define a combat veteran?

And if you are telling me that a combat veteran is somebody that went overseas, did a peacekeeping mission, got hostile fire pay, I would have to disagree. And I don't mean to offend anybody.

Because a veteran to me is somebody that went on a mission and did what they had to for their country, for their families, and for the people back home. That's what a veteran is to me. They went overseas.

It wasn't their choice that they didn't have to fire rounds. There's many of us in this room that never fired a round. And there's a lot of us in this room that got Purple Hearts, been blown up and have to shoot the enemy, and I'm speaking frankly.

What's the difference? We're all veterans, we all went overseas and served our country. But we're saying because they didn't get a medal, they didn't get a couple of extra dollars in their paycheck, that they can't grow -- join the greatest organization for veterans on the planet.

And I say that's a crying shame, and to be frank, I'm a little bit embarrassed at some of the things

that my fellow comrades said because I've met the greatest veterans of my life and they've never fired a round and I've met some veterans -- and I've lost some veterans in war. And I tell you what, all of them are veterans to me. And with that, Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I call for the question.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We have a call for the question. Is there a second?

COMRADE HINES: Randall Hines Post 9612, Pacific Areas, I call for a second.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We do have a second. We want to move to voting for calling for the question. All in favor, signify by saying, aye?

AUDIENCE: Aye.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Opposed?

Ayes have it.

We're going to move on the adoption of the Resolution 204.

All those -- all those in favor, signify by saying aye.

AUDIENCE: Aye.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Opposed? That was close.

We better go -- just kidding. The resolution is defeated.

CHAIRMAN MOON: Comrades, I will now read to you those resolutions that were up for rejection. Resolution Number 201, family rate.

Resolution number 202, inclusion of military working dogs in VFW membership.

Resolution number 203, motorcycle clubs groups and associations.

Are there any that they want set aside?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 1.

COMRADE SMITH: Dale Smith, Post 3783, Department of California.

I move to adopt Resolution 203.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We have a motion to adopt 203.

Is there a second? Microphone 3.

COMRADE FREITAS: Jody FREITAS, Post 523, Department of Massachusetts.

I second the motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We have a motion to second.

Is there any discussion on this motion?

Microphone 1.

COMRADE RILEY: Comrade Commander in Chief, Mike Riley, VFW Post 1069, Ohio.

I'm also the Ohio State VFW Riders President. I am opposed to this motion.

We have an issue with the connotation of MC and VFW; granted these guys were given a charter 15, 20 years ago. I think mistakenly there is 34 states with VFW -- recognized VFW riders groups, we are trying to pull together as a single unit.

This resolution, if passed, changes the name of VFW CA Motorcycle Club to VFW Motorcycle Club. I believe that is a bad thing for our organization as a whole. I would like to see how many people are in the VFW Riders Group if they could stand up because I don't know how many of you guys want to be associated as an MC or with an MC or accidentally with an MC.

Raise your hands if you want to.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: That's all right. Address the chair.

No. No. You said -- talk to talk to me. You want to be in charge for a minute? Sure.

I want to keep going. Keep going.

COMRADE RILEY: Anyway, what I was saying was that I don't think -- well, there's an issue with leadership in the VFW Riders Association that I would like to talk with somebody about after the convention. But in the meantime, you're not getting a consensus of your VFW Riders Group members.

This is a -- this is kind of a last-minute thing, as far as I was concerned, I was really surprised to read what was in it. There's going to be people that come up and say, "We don't want you guys in our group, we're not going to this, we're not going to do that."

They want to -- one of the things they want to be able to do is expand. They said that they

can't expand and get into another state until they have a member there. Well, nothing personal, but that's how viruses grow, too. I don't want to be a member of a MC and I don't want to be associated. If I wanted to join an MC, trust me, I would. So with that, I oppose this motion and I yield.

Thank you, Commander.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 3.

COMRADE FREITAS: I have an amendment to make, but before I just want to make a comment.

Are we equating our fellow comrades in the VFW to a virus

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Who are you?

COMRADE FREITAS: Jody Freitas, Post 523 Department of Massachusetts.

I'd like to make a motion to amend Resolution 203 as follows if a resolution can make an amendment.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Okay.

COMRADE FREITAS: So strike whereas in the second paragraph, combine the first and second paragraphs. Strike the seventh paragraph.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Jody, hold on a second. We got to make sure we're getting that up here.

COMRADE FREITAS: I have it written. I'll give it to you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Okay. Fair enough.

COMRADE FREITAS: Replace the final paragraph with the following, "Be resolved at the name of the VFW California MC be officially changed to the VFW MC to show national participation as one club.

All new charters will grow off of existing charter chapters as the motorcycle club expands nationally by following the VFW Club Bylaws and VFW National Bylaws and allow to continue to exist, providing they adhere to the guidelines as provided for in Section 708 and 709 of the National Bylaws."

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I have a motion to amend.

Do I have a second? Microphone 1. I'm sorry, Dale.

COMRADE SMITH: Commander, Dale Smith, Post 3783 Department of California. I second that motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I have a motion to second. Any questions on the motion?

COMRADE LITTLE: Comrade Commander, Ashley Little, Post 4548, for information. When we started the VFWs' Riders Group I don't remember exactly if it was 2011 or if it was 2012, it was tabled one year and we brought it back at the next convention.

But correct me if I'm wrong, we grandfathered in a Veterans of Foreign Wars Motorcycle Club. So if we grandfathered in a Veterans of Foreign Wars Motorcycle Club out of California, mind you, it was grandfathered in as a Veterans of Foreign Wars Motorcycle Club, grandfathered in, now we're going to take the California out of it?

And on what I just heard him read, we're going to change it to a Veterans of Foreign Wars Motorcycle Club? We didn't grandfather in a Veterans of Foreign Wars Motorcycle Club. We grandfathered in a Veterans of Foreign Wars California Motorcycles Club.

That's something I think we ought to think about there.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Any other discussion on the amendment? Microphone 1.

COMRADE LUKE: Comrade Commander in Chief, Eric Luke, VFW Post 1512, Department of California. This organization has been around for 20 years. And I -- a little history, I've been in it that long.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Comrade, I don't -- I know what you're -- is this about the amendment, the discussion? I -- I'm asking you. Or is it -- or is this about the motion -- the first motion or is just about the amendment?

COMRADE LUKE: I'm sorry, then I'm out of order.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Is there any further discussion on the amendment?

Microphone 3

COMRADE ANDERSON: Tom Anderson, Department of Maryland.

I'm opposed to this whole thing. We just started this, and he had wanted us to –

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Tom, we're only talking about the amendment, pal. Just the amendment. You can say you're opposed to the amendment, that's fine.

COMRADE ANDERSON: Okay. Never mind.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Hey, Tom, when we get past the amendment, you -- please come back. I'm just trying to stay with the -- I got a national parliamentarian down there, you know, trying to keep me straight. I got to throw you under the bus. Microphone 2.

COMRADE SOUSA: Chief, Dave Sousa, Nevada. My thing is motorcycle clubs. I cannot approve an amendment, anything, that says motorcycle clubs.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you.

Any other discussions? Microphone -- only the amendment, Microphone 1.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 23: Comrade Commander in Chief, I've had a request that the amendment be read for clarification.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Sure. Need my glasses. No woo with glasses. Jody, it's the whole thing, correct? If amended, it would read, "Whereas, prior to the adoption of Resolution number 308, the 111th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, August 23, 2010, motorcycle clubs, groups, and associations existed as units of post with authority of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

And the VFW CA MC have been operating since 2003 under the authorization of signature of John J. Senk, Jr., then Adjutant General under the command of then Commander in Chief, Edward S. Banas, Sr., Veterans of the Foreign Wars of the United States.

And whereas these units have not caused any discredit to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States nor the sponsoring post, and whereas temporary coordination between these motorcycle clubs, groups, and associations may have and was required prior to the establishment of said clubs, groups, and associations with members of the confederation of clubs for the purpose of ensuring the safety of riders and no further contact under such coordination has existed.

And whereas, there is pride in a current existence of these motorcycle clubs, groups, and associations that have been instilled for years and has brought pride in comradeship amongst our younger members, and whereas these units have existed and are controlled under Section 708 and 709 of the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Bylaws now.

Therefore, be it resolved that the name of the VFW CA MC be officially changed to the VFW MC to show national participation as one club. All new charters will grow off the existing charter chapters as the motorcycle club expands nationally by following the VFW Club Bylaws and VFW National Bylaws, and allowed to continue to exist, providing they adhere to the guidelines as provided for in Section 708 and 709 of the National Bylaws."

Is there any other discussion on the amendment? Microphone 1.

COMRADE KING: Commander-in-Chief, Chris King, Post 10427 Department of Texas, Vice Chairman of the Department of Texas Motorcycle Group.

I rise an opposition to the amendment as we are a motorcycle group. This sounds like it would create two entities within the state or within the VFW, where the motorcycle group, without any desire to become a club, and it would override us.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 3.

COMRADE STAFFORD: Greg Stafford, Department of North Carolina, national delegate Post 6868.

The type of world that I came from, if you labeled yourself as an MC, that means you were a 1 percent club, and a lot of these outlaw clubs will beat the crap out of you if you come –

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Comrade Greg, is it about the amendment? Is this about the amendment, I'm asking?

COMRADE STAFFORD: The amendment says MC, don't it?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Okay.

COMRADE STAFFORD: Motorcycle Club?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Notice of resolution, continue. Continue, I'm sorry.

COMRADE STAFFORD: Okay. And we got to be careful with the terminology. If we go MC, that's a 1 percent club where I'm from. And 1 percent clubs don't like you. You know what a 1 percent – law motorcycle gang, you know?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Okay. That's the amendment I get it. I get what you're saying.

COMRADE STAFFORD: I thought that was the amendment.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: The amendment is both of them have motorcycle club in it, both the resolution.

COMRADE STAFFORD: Right. Right.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We -- we're only talking about whether to amend this –

COMRADE STAFFORD: Okay.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: -- or we -- we're talking only about to amend the original motion, that's all.

COMRADE STAFFORD: Okay.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I mean, you could come back and talk how either way.

COMRADE STAFFORD: Okay. Call the vote on the amendment.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Call to question the amendment.

Is there a second?

Microphone 2.

COMRADE SCHAEFFLER: Comrade in Chief, Bill Schaeffler, delegate 1222, Past All-American Commander Arizona. I will second that.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We have a motion to second to call the question on the amendment.

All in favor?

AUDIENCE: Aye.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Opposed? Call for question does not pass. We'll continue with discussion on the amendment.

Microphone 2.

COMRADE ANDERSON: Mr. Sarmiento, Commander in Chief, I guess.

Tom Anderson, Post 488 Texas, Past State Chairman for the motorcycle group, and I'm currently with the Rider's Advisory Committee. Talking with the members late yesterday, we are absolutely against this program.

The amendment would change our denomination and what we are about, and we are also against that. So that's where I'm at, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you.

Discussion now on the amendments. Microphone 3.

COMRADE PRYOR-GABBY: Commander in Chief, Russell Pryor-Gabby from VFW Post 2681, Indiana, Indiana State Riders Chairman.

What I'm here to talk about is the MC and the connotation that the comrade before me just spoke about. MC means Motorcycle Club, it does not designate you as a 1 percenter. I've ridden in motorcycle clubs, I have never been a 1 percenter, nor do I care to be a 1 percenter.

But a motorcycle club? Yes, because of the comradery, the family, the brotherhood that we had, that's what I'm talking about. MC has a variation of meaning, not 1 percenter. Thank you, Commander.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Comrades, stand by.

Standby, comrades. We have some -- well, I've just been advised of some information. In the last bid resolved, it states, "All new charters will grow off existing charter chapters and expand nationally."

I was advised that this is them issuing charters, and with the -- if that is the case, this amendment

is out of order. Pulling this amendment out of order. It is out of order. We are going back to the main discussion, though, the main discussion is still in order. Everybody got that? We're still on the main resolution?

Microphone 1.

COMRADE LUKE: Comrade, Commander in Chief. I think I'm in order this time.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Yeah, I think so, bro.

COMRADE LUKE: Eric Luke, VFW Post 1512, Department of California.

All right.

I'm going to start off by clearing up all the misconceptions. One, the Riders Group and us are not being put under the same umbrella. So the states that think we're going to come in there and you're going to be forced to become the MC, it's two different communities, all right?

There's a brotherhood, a tight -- a very tight brotherhood because you earned your patch to be MC. The gentleman over there just cleared up that not every MC is a 1 percenter, there are 99 percent of other MCs that are not.

So quit thinking -- quit watching Sons of Anarchy, quit thinking everybody is the Hell's Angels, quit thinking everybody is a Bandidos because that's not the case, all right? This organization has been around 20 years.

We work the VFW's mission, "No one does more for vets," harder than anybody in this room.

My people are going to talk about that as they get to the microphone. I'm sorry, I think I have the mic.

We are a force multiplier, all right?

There are people in this room right now that own motorcycles that don't want to be in an RG. We're that option. Just like when the RG went nationwide, how -- the multiple growth that we got off of that membership, the MC can be the same thing for people that want to be in an MC.

We can show you what you got -- we can do, these guys are going to tell you what we do, and hopefully we get the support we're looking for. Thank you, Commander.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you.

Microphone 1.

COMRADE FRY: Commander, Myles Fry, Post 2080, State of California.

So the VFW Motorcycle Club touches the demographic that the VFW goes nowhere. Hear me out, please. The motorcycle community is largely comprised of younger veterans and people that truly want to give back to the community and not just sit at the canteen at the local post.

Motorcycle enthusiasts across the community ask us about eligible -- if they're eligible for the VFW and we thank them for their service. We are all life members of the VFW. We are not standing to fight here for our existence, but rather to indicate membership and allow our brothers and sisters that left for various reasons a chance to ride in our organization that they have sacrificed so much for.

We support the Enlisted Project, Warrior Foundation Freedom Station, stand-downs in both North County, Riverside, and San Diego. Our focal point is the community and comradery within our group and promoting the VFW everywhere we go. Instead of grouping us with the thousands of MCs that exist in the United States, seek us out, talk to us, and ask us what we're all about and let's plan a ride.

Thank you very much.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 1.

COMRADE BUSS: Commander, Chairman, Kevin Buss, VFW Life Member, Winchester Post 4379.

I'm also a proud member of the VFW Motorcycle Club. I've been a VFW member for 33 years. I've been a VFW Motorcycle Club member for 12 years. I think one of the problems we have today is education. People are not aware of what a motorcyclist -- what a motorcycle club is. There's negative stereotypes out there and I'll give a prime example.

Our local senior center did not receive food on Columbus Day if it fell during the week. The government did not provide the food. They asked the Motorcycle Club to come in and cook for them. We were told to expect 50 people. We cooked for 100. 12 people showed up.

I'm a wallflower, I'm afraid to talk to people, so after we finished the meal, I walked around and

talked to each and every person. And they said they were afraid. They heard a motorcycle gang was coming and they thought they were afraid of what we were going to force them to eat.

What came from that day, ten years ago, last year, we provided 120 meals to those people.

Once they got to know who we were, what we do on a day-to-day basis, they accepted us with open arms. All I ask is that the membership give us a chance to continue our good deeds and let us earn your trust and respect. We don't want anything given to us, but give us the chance to be successful in other areas. Sir, I thank you for your time.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you.

Microphone 2.

COMRADE SCHAEFFLER: Comrade Commander in Chief, Bill Schaeffler, VFW Post 1222 Arizona.

I am a member of the Riders, I've been a member of the VFW Riders, I believe it was 2008 or '09, about then, Jean, right? Been around the Riders for a minute, been around the MC once or twice.

The problem with -- for us in Arizona is that MC keeps sending new chapters to try and form in our state when they are unauthorized. They have never been authorized in the State of Arizona.

Seven department commanders have told them, "Take your stuff and get it out of here, you're not going to run that MC stuff here." We are a Rider's group and yet we are currently still battling them. They are here, some of them wearing an Arizona VFW MC patch.

That's a fake patch. That's a fake patch. We never authorized it, you never authorized it, they're wearing it here with our Cross of Malta on.

Another issue, we all went down range and we did our service and earned our eligibility, right? Did we join the VFW and then be told we have to prospect to be a member of that VFW? And yet they prospect their members into their motorcycle club.

If we do have a little sit-down discussion with them between the Riders and the MC, the whole discussion is we are the elite and you are weak. I don't think they belong.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone 3.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Comrade Commander in Chief, Dan West, post delegate, Post 3413. I call the question.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I have a motion. I need a second.

Microphone 3?

COMRADE ORGAN: Commander, Steve Organ, Department of Mississippi Post 5390.

I second that call to question.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I have a second to motion and second to call for the question. All in favor calling to question signify by saying aye.

AUDIENCE: Aye.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: No vote? Ayes have it. All right. We're voting on the original Resolution 204. Right? Oh, I'm sorry, 203.

All in favor of adoption of Resolution 203, signify by saying aye.

AUDIENCE: Aye.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: All opposed? No documented. Where were we?

CHAIRMAN MOON: Comrades, we have two resolutions.

201 family rate.

202 inclusion of the military working dogs.

Is there any of those that we want set aside today?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Do I have a motion to accept 201 and 202?

Okay. Hearing none, they are rejected.

COMRADE MOON: Comrade Commander in Chief, thank you very much for this appointment.

COMMITTEE REPORT: GENERAL RESOLUTIONS BY
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF WILLIAM "BILL" THIEN

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: You're welcome.
 You're not going to talk to me anymore.
 I'd like to call a report on Committee on General Resolutions, Past Commander in Chief Bill Thien. Vice Chairman Past Commander in Chief Harold Roesch, I assure you this one should be done.
 CHAIRMAN THIEN: We're going to make this as painless as possible.
 Commander in Chief Sarmiento, I report to you the Convention Committee on General Resolutions convened at 2:00 p.m. Sunday, July 28, 2024. Roll call was taken, preliminary matters were discussed, the committee carefully deliberated its assigned resolutions.
 I would like to report the following: 301, 302 was ruled out of order. 303 was rejected.
 I wish to express my appreciation for the members of the committee for their hard work and dedication. Thank you, Chief, for the appointment.
 COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you, Chief.
 Is there a motion to adopt 303? There being none, dead.
 COMRADE WHITE: I'm sorry.
 COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Oh, I'm sorry.
 COMRADE WHITE: No, I'm sorry. No worries. Sorry.
 COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: No, I -- Comrade, my bad. Go ahead. Not your day. My bad. I want to give everybody the opportunity. You may have been in the back. Look, if you're going -- if something gets rejected, though, and you know it, don't wait until the last minute. Run.
 COMRADE WHITE: I wasn't --
 COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I mean, be up to the mic.
 COMRADE WHITE: Sir --
 COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: What the hell you doing way back there? Oh, I thought you were pointing at the back corner.
 Microphone number 1. All right.
 COMRADE WHITE: Comrade Commander, William H. White, Jr., Post 3466, post commander and a delegate of South Charleston, West Virginia, and a proud Gold Star Family member.
 This flag, I've been fighting for this for the last two or three years.
 COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Comrade, we need a motion if you want to bring this up.
 COMRADE WHITE: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'll make a motion for -- to adopt this resolution.
 COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I have a motion to adopt 303.
 Is there a second? Is there -- microphone number 2.
 COMRADE WISEMAN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Ken Wiseman, National Councilmember from the Department.
 To pass this, I second the motion.
 COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I have a motion and second. Microphone 1.
 COMRADE WHITE: Thank you. Once again, Comrade Commander, my name is William H. White, Jr. I'm the post commander and post delegate of 3466, South Charleston, West Virginia, excuse me, and a Gold Star Family member.
 And last year, I was up here at the microphone and got shut down with a call, you know, at the end. The question -- well, the -- one of our members from the West Virginia was in the resolution committee about this. And one of the questions that came up and the main reason why it got rejected was they were saying a trademark issue for being able to fly the flag.
 Now, the individual who brought that up was from Europe. Now, there might be an issue overseas in Europe, but as far as I know, in this -- in the U.S., there is no problem with flying the flag. I give the flag out all the time.
 There's posts all over the place in West Virginia that are flying the flag. The Honor and Remember Flag was set aside to give to families of service members that were killed in action. It is given to that service member at a separate ceremony. This has nothing to do with the graveside burial. Like I said last year, this flag does not even go on a coffin.

This flag does not replace any other flag. This flag is given to the serviceman's family in recognition of their death so that they can fly it on special occasions. We all sit here and we said the other day we totally support the Gold Star Families and the Gold Star Mothers.

Well, guess what? This flag, the Gold Star Families are trying to get this as a national flag.

They are running against politicians in Washington, DC. Now, there are currently 28 states that have adopted this flag within their state to be eligible to be flown on their state buildings.

With that said, all we are asking is for the flag to be -- have some kind of backing from the VFW in order so we can get this pushed through national legislation to be recognized as a flag to honor and remember those service members that were killed in action.

I yield the floor, Comrade Commander.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone number 1.

COMRADE DELANEY: Commander-in-Chief, Ronald Delaney, Past State Commander, State of Louisiana, delegate.

This has been argued for years, okay?

Every time it comes up, it gets shot down. Because in this first part, it says, "Be it resolved by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States to endorse the Honor and Remember flag as a national flag of the -- of remembrance for those who have given the ultimate sacrifice to this nation." That is our flag, and that is the only flag we need to have to -- do we not give it to the families?

Yes, we do.

That is our flag.

I yield it back, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Microphone number 2.

COMRADE HACKETT: Comrade Commander, J.R. Hackett, Post 9365, Alaska.

I agree with the guy who just said this has been here on the floor several times. Nobody's saying that these families can't fly that flag anywhere in their yard any time they want. They want to do that, that's why it was issued to them.

They can fly the flag. On goes life.

I call for the question.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We have a motion to call for the -- we have a call for the question.

Is there a second?

Microphone 3.

COMRADE BABCOCK: Commander-in-Chief, K.J. Babcock, 7137 delegate, Department of Idaho.

I second the motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: All in favor call for the question, signify by saying aye.

AUDIENCE: Aye.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Opposed?

AUDIENCE: Nay.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Going back to the adoption of this resolution, 303. All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

AUDIENCE: Aye.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Opposed?

AUDIENCE: No.

COMMITTEE REPORT: NATIONAL SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS
BY PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF JOHN STROUD

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Defeated. The next past chief on the fire line, who's reported to the Committee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Past Commander-in-Chief John Stroud. Past Commander-in-Chief Eubank.

CHAIRMAN STROUD: Thank you, Comrade
Commander-in-Chief. We'll try to show them how it's done. Command-in-Chief Sarmiento, I report the short convention committee on National Security and Foreign Affairs convened at 2:00 p.m., Sunday, July 28, 2024.

The committee's vice chairman is Past Commander-in-Chief Richard Eubank. Roll call was taken and the committee was addressed by the director for the Defense Personnel Accounting Agency, Major General Kelly McKeague, Vice Minister Wu of the Taiwan Veterans Affairs Counsel, and VFW National Ambassador, Retired SEAC Troxell.

The Committee carefully deliberated each of the 18 resolutions that it was assigned. Before proceeding to the report, I wish to express appreciation to Bob Jackson, Director of Operations for the Washington office, for the valuable technical guidance which they and their staff provided to the Committee.

I also want to thank Brad Hazell, Washington office staff, who served as our committee's secretary by organizing our committee's resolutions and preparing this report.

Commander-in-Chief, with your permission, I will begin the committee report by presenting those resolutions the committee recommends to be approved as written, then proceed to report those resolutions that failed to be adopted.

If for any reason you or the delegates to this convention would like a resolution set aside for further discussion, nobody will, please so indicate after we have completed each such segment of the report.

The following resolutions have been recommended for approval: 401, preserve the all-volunteer force, 402, eliminate sexual assault and harassment in the military, 403, ensure DOD compliance with the TAP law, 404, keep defense budget relevant, 405, link military pay increases to private sector increases, 406, provide full concurrent receipt of military retirement, 407, pay NVA disability compensation, 411, recognition for Afghan and Iraqi combat support, 412, support the Republic of China on Taiwan, 413, support the Republic of Korea, 414, support the State of Israel, 415, support of NATO deterrence and support to Ukraine, 416, deported veterans, 418, expand the dates of eligibility for the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, and 419, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for support of Ukraine.

Commander, I move to accept the committee's recommendation to approve these resolutions. There were not any resolutions that the committee recommended to be amended.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Do we have a motion out of committee to accept them, the four series as a block? Any questions on the motion?

Any questions on the motion? All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

AUDIENCE: Aye.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Opposed? Ayes have it. You showed them how to do it.

CHAIRMAN STROUD: Thank you, Comrades.

I will now read the resolution numbers and titles that the committee recommends to be disapproved or rejected. Number 408, awarding the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for expeditionary operations in Eastern Europe. Staff notes: failed to adopt in favor of resolution of 419, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for support of Ukraine. 417, recognition of adding 74 sailors on the Vietnam Memorial.

Staff comments: accident with a ship collision to add those casualties to the VVM.

This was a training accident outside of the combat zone. This was debated for 45 minutes last year, and the Vietnam veterans present were against this resolution. If passed, the VVM would necessitate substantial modification and possibly a wholesale replacement of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall as it exists today.

Per the Department of the Interior, recommend rejection based on discussion committee next year. And lastly, 420, definition of Gold Star Family member. VFW should not weigh in on this matter, as this was in the purview of other organizations, i.e., Gold Star Wives, Gold Star Families, et cetera.

Commander, I recommend that we do not adopt these resolutions. Without a motion to approve these resolutions, they will not be advanced.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Any motions to approve the resolutions? Hearing none, motion died.

CHAIRMAN STROUD: Comrade Commander, this concludes the committee's report on National Security and Foreign Affairs, and we request to be excused.

COMMITTEE REPORT: SUBCOMMITTEE POW/MIA
BY PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF JOHN HAMILTON

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: You can't be. You have a subcommittee. You can't be excused yet. Now a report of subcommittee on POW/MIA, Chairman, Past Commander-in-Chief John Hamilton.

It's all right.

CHAIRMAN HAMILTON: This is Keith Harman. He's the co-chairman of the -- vice chairman of this committee. Commander-in-Chief, that I report to you the convention committee subcommittee POW/MIAs met on Sunday, 28th July, at 2:30 p.m.

The subcommittee carefully debated each of three resolutions that were assigned before proceeding elected report and expressed appreciation of Bob Jackson, director of operations for the Washington office, for his valuable technical guidance, which they and their staff provided to the committee.

Bob, did I write -- say that just as you wrote it? Is that good?

Okay. All right.

I also want to thank Brad Hazell, Washington office staff, who served on our committee as a secretary of organizing our subcommittee's resolutions and preparing this. Commander, with your permission, I will begin with the committee reports by presenting those resolutions the committee recommends to be approved as written, and then proceed with the resolution and fail to be adopted.

If for any reason you, the delegates of this convention, would like a resolution set aside for further discussion, please so indicate after we have completed each segment of this report.

I will now proceed by reading the resolution numbers and titles of the committee recommend -- which the committee recommends as written. Resolution 409, protect POW/MIA, full accounting mission funding. Resolution 410, call for more unilateral POW/MIA actions by Vietnam. Commander, I move the -- I move -- we accept the Committee's recommendation to approve these resolutions.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Do we have a motion out of committee? Pass the resolutions. Any questions on the motion? Any questions on the motion? All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

AUDIENCE: Aye.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Opposed? Passed.

CHAIRMAN HAMILTON: There were not any resolutions by the committee recommended that were changed, recommended for approval, also for your information. Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I will now read the -- or, Commander, the resolution numbers and the titles the committee recommends that were not adopted.

And 421 was not adopted. It was ruled out of order. Commander, I recommend that we not adopt this resolution.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: That resolution is out of order and can't be brought up even with a motion.

Thank you. Is that it, Chief?

CHAIRMAN HAMILTON: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, that is all we have.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: And past commander-in-chief and vice -- I didn't mention -

- I didn't mention he was on it. He was the subchair of this, so, sorry, Keith.

COMMITTEE REPORT: VETERANS SERVICE RESOLUTIONS
BY PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ROBERT "BOB" WALLACE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Reporting Committee on Veteran Service and Resolutions, Past Commander-in-Chief from the great state of New Jersey, Bob Wallace, and Vice Chairman Tim Borland, Past Commander-in-Chief. Great state.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF WALLACE: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief, comrades.

Let me, first of all, recognize Vice Chairman Tim Borland, Past Commander-in-Chief, and Past Commander-in-Chief Brian Duffy, who helped us on the committee. And all the service officers that were part of the committee, and also the other members of the committee, because they did a great job.

They persevered for a few hours. The committee was addressed by the VA under-secretary for health, the chairman of the Board of Appeals of Veterans Claims, the deputy under-secretary for operations for the cemetery system in the VA, and the assistant secretary for veterans' employment and training service.

So we had the A team come and talk to the committee before we went into the resolution. There were three subcommittees. And the Subcommittee 1 was on health, chaired by Belinda Beauvais (phonetic) from Georgia and Vice Chairman John Johnson from South Carolina.

Staff advisors were Katherine Cassell (phonetic), assistant director of Veterans Health Policy, National Veterans Service, and Meggan Thomas, associate director of National Legislative Service.

Subcommittee 2 was benefits, chaired by Eric Drake from Ohio and Vice Chairman Shawn Ransford from Indiana. Staff advisors were Chris Macinkowicz, deputy director of National Veterans Service, Nancy Springer, the associate director of National Legislative Service.

Subcommittee 3 was economic opportunities, chaired by Laurie Clay from Virginia and Vice Chairman Jessica King from Pennsylvania. Staff advisors were Cindy Noel, assistant director of field operations, National Veterans Service, and Kristina Keenan, who is the deputy director of National Legislative Service.

And I also want to express my sincere appreciation to Mike Figlioli, Pat Murray, Ryan Gallucci, and the staff of the Washington office for their advice, counsel, and working with us during the committee meetings.

Especially I want to recognize Chris. Chris did a super-duper job.

I'll begin by – the committee report by presenting those resolutions the Committee recommends to be approved as written, that seek to report those resolutions that are recommended approved as amended, and then those resolutions that were recommended rejected.

Recommended -- I now move the approval of the following resolutions: 601, adequate Department of Veterans Affairs and budget.

602, VA pharmaceutical co-payments.

603, VA Medicare and TRICARE reimbursement.

604, nursing home eligibility.

605, traumatic brain injury healthcare.

606, PTSD and mental healthcare.

607, VA healthcare for women veterans.

608, expand VA caregiver benefits.

609, sustainable community care options for veterans.

610, foreign medical care program.

611, electronic health records management.

612, military sexual trauma.

613, tinnitus and hearing loss presumptive compensable service connection.

614, VA claims workload, 615, toxic exposures.

616, digital claims process.

617, VA life insurance program.
618, domiciliary programs and temporary total ratings.
619, protecting VA accreditation.
620, AMA remand.
621, VSO involvement with the VA -- VASRD, the rating schedule.
622, fair and favorable effective dates.
623, justice for all veteran -- for ALS veterans, 624, improved benefits for survivors.
625, veterans housing and food security priorities, 626, ensure veteran success in education.
627, Veterans Readiness and Employment program eligibility.
628, support veterans employment training program.
629, veteran entrepreneurship.
630, underserved veterans.
631, consumer protection for veterans.
632, expand Veteran Treatment Court.
633, free application for federal student aid.
635, government headstones.
637, VA home loan correction.
647, require Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs
CHAMPVA acceptance.
They were all submitted and approved as written.
The ones that were amended: 603, VA Medicare and TRICARE reimbursement, we added to
include TRICARE overseas at the end of the pay resolve.
634, support and assistance for surviving family members of veteran suicide.
We removed veteran suicide awareness through the Department of Veterans Affairs.
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Are there any set asides?
Microphone 1.
COMRADE DORIS: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Robert Doris (phonetic), Department of
Europe.
I request to set aside 611.
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: 611 is set aside.
Any other set asides? Hearing no other set asides, we'll have a motion for those approved by
the committee.
Doesn't need a second. All those in favor, signify by saying aye.
AUDIENCE: Aye.
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Opposed?
Ayes have it. 611 set aside. Set aside 611.
Microphone 1 for discussion.
COMRADE DORIS: Thank you, Comrade.
Under the -- I wish to amend -- 611 be amended under the third whereas, the fourth paragraph.
As -- "whereas the medical records submitted to the VHA to support reimbursement under the Foreign
Medical Program are not being added to the veteran's medical records."
This practice prevents the continuity of care to -- that the veteran may receive at the VAMCs, as
well as requiring superfluous submission of medical records when applying for future VA compensation,
which delays adjudication.
Be it resolved that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the VA to
provide competent command and control from the VHA leadership and enforce standardization of the
electronic health record, the EHR, integrated across VA facilities, including medical records received
under the Foreign Medical Program and continued partnership and collaboration with VSO stakeholders.
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Comrade, thank you.
Is there a second to the amendment?

Microphone 2.

COMRADE ZIMMERMAN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Monti Zimmerman, VFW Post 7589 delegate.

I second the motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you.

We have a motion second. Is there any discussion on the motion?

Microphone 1.

COMRADE ZIMMERMAN: If I can give background about this.

When a veteran who lives in a foreign country, or visiting a foreign country, gets care for a service-connected condition, it falls under the Foreign Medical Program. This program is a reimbursement program for treatment and care received for service-connected conditions.

In order to submit this claim, the veteran has to submit the record of care with each itemized list, as well as proof of payment. The VA then will mail them a check from the Department of Treasury for the reimbursement. This is going to the VHA, but it does not go into the veterans record at all, whether it's in VBMS -- I'm the Department of Europe service officer, by the way.

Or into the veteran's health record. So if the veteran goes back to the States and gets care at a VA -- veteran hospital, they have no record of what medication, what treatment, what diagnostics have been done for that veteran, which can endanger that veteran's life.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Is there any further discussion?

I recognize Ryan Gallucci.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GALLUCCI: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Ryan Gallucci, delegate, Virginia, Post 3150.

I want to speak on this because this resolution simply speaks to the VA electronic health record.

I believe that this amendment would be out of order because the Foreign Medical Program is a VA Community Care program. While this does require -- while this would warrant, certainly, a separate resolution to speak to the return of Foreign Medical Program records to VA, this specific resolution from the committee simply speaks to implementation of an electronic health record throughout the VA healthcare system.

Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Is there -- is there any further discussion on the -- on the -- on the amendment? Microphone 1.

COMRADE ZIMMERMAN: I understand -- I understand, Ryan.

You are correct. However, I consider the Foreign Medical Program a stakeholder for the VHA. And part of that is processing the Foreign Medical Program's claims. And the -- and filling this vacuum is necessary for the safety of the veteran.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you, Comrade.

Any further discussion? Hearing none, we're going to vote on the amendment.

All in favor of amending that resolution, signify by saying aye.

AUDIENCE: Aye.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: All opposed?

AUDIENCE: Oppose.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Motion is not amended. Back to the discussion on the original resolution.

Is there any discussion? Any -- all those in favor the resolution, signify by saying aye.

AUDIENCE: Aye.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Opposed?

AUDIENCE: No.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Passed.

To the comrade from Europe, the service officer, DSO, I think what -- Ryan, we can -- Ryan, you're looking for a separate -- you -- Ryan, type that out, we'll put in a separate resolution for sure, all right?

It's just you got -- you got caught up in a technicality is what happened.

Anything else for the vice chairman?

CO-CHAIRMAN BORLAND: Good afternoon, Comrades.

Last but not least, your immediate past commander-in-chief.

These following resolutions were recommended not to be adopted, and I want to keep in mind there's 11 of them, but ten of them, the reason why is because the Commander-in-Chief's resolutions prior to this have already been approved and they're similar.

I will read the following resolutions that were recommended not to be adopted.

636, traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder program in favor of Commander-in-Chief Resolution 606.

638, recognized presumptive conditions from Fort McClellan, Alabama, in favor of Commander-in-Chief's Resolution 615.

639, continue fighting to end veterans homelessness, in favor of Commander-in-Chief Resolution 625.

640, support women veterans, in favor of Commander-in-Chief's Resolution 630, which addresses underserved veterans.

641, tinnitus and hearing loss presumptive service connection, in favor of Commander-in-Chief Resolution 613, already covers adding hearing loss and tinnitus as presumptive conditions.

642, expand Veteran Treatment Courts, in favor of Commander-in-Chief Resolution 632, with the same title, covers the intent of this resolution.

643, military sexual trauma, MST, in favor of command -- Commander-in-Chief Resolution 612 with the same title that covers this intent.

644, increased veterans barrier benefits. This resolution was accomplished last year, and there was already an increase in these benefits.

645, urged Congress to support the Major Richard Star Act, in favor of Commander-in-Chief Resolution 406, and the National Security and Foreign Affairs resolutions, which covers the provisions of the Major Richard Star Act, in that it is written to allow VFW to continue to advocate for full concurrent receipt of military retirement and VA Disability compensation.

646, automatically generate claims upon diagnosis. Commander -- in favor of Commander-in-Chief Resolution 622, which covers assigned earlier effects date -- effective dates based on treatment.

And last but not least, 648, veteran suicide awareness. This department resolution is a duplicate of Commander-in-Chief's Resolution 606, which covers mental health disorders. Commander-in-Chief, I recommend that we do not adopt these resolutions.

Without a motion to approve these resolutions, they will not be advanced.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Is there a motion to adopt any of these resolutions?
Being none, motion dies.

CLOSING CEREMONIES

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Sergeant at Arms, will you please perform the closing ceremonies?

SERGEANT AT ARMS WILLETTE: Comrades, all rise. Comrade National Chaplain, would you lead us in our closing prayer?

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Uncover. Parade rest.

CHAPLAIN FREI: Lord, as we close for the day, guide us to think about the things that we have learned today and the things we will do tomorrow.

Help us to process information we are presented with and use it effectively to assist our fellow veterans. May our evening be full of rekindling old friendships and making new friends.

Help us to prepare for the rest of this week, as the finer details will make the VFW more successful for the care of our comrades. May we all return tomorrow morning ready to work together.

Amen.

AUDIENCE: Amen.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Atten-hut. Comrades, face the flag of our nation. Please join me in a final salute to our colors.

Present arms.

Order arms.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, that completes the closing ceremony of this session of the 125th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you.

(CONFERENCE ADJOURNED AT 5:16 P.M.)

BUSINESS SESSION
TUESDAY, JULY 30, 2024

(The Business Session of the 125th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and the 111th National Convention of the VFW Auxiliary, held in the Louisville International Convention Center, Louisville, Kentucky, was called to order on Tuesday, July 30, 2024, at 8:00 a.m., by Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento)

CALL TO ORDER
SALUTE TO COLORS
INVOCATION: NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DAVID FREI
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Comrades, I will now reconvene the 125th VFW National Convention. Sergeant-at-Arms, you will please conduct the opening ceremonies.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Yes, sir, Commander-in-Chief, sir.

Veterans of Foreign Wars of the States, atten-hut, Comrades facing the flag of our nation, please join me in an opening salute to our colors.

(Salute to Colors.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Comrade National Chaplain, will you please lead us in our opening prayer.

CHAPLAIN FREI: God, you are the creator of all that is. We come into your presence this day with open hearts. We give thanks to you for the bounty of your blessings, for the love of families, friends, and comrades.

Lord, help those who are in their time of need, especially those that are contemplating suicide. We will now have a moment of silent prayer for our departed comrades and for those missing in action and those held prisoners of war.

Lord, direct us so that we may perform our duties faithfully and efficiently throughout this day.

Amen.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Amen.

AUDIENCE: Amen.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, atten-hut.

Cover.

Comrades honoring the flag of our nation, please join me in our pledge of allegiance.

Present arms.

AUDIENCE: I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Order arms.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, that completes the opening ceremonies of this session of the 125th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, sir.

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

CONVENTION CREDENTIALS REPORT: BETTY GRIPP

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Everyone, please be seated. I would like to -- I would like to call Betty Gripp for the report of credentials.

Betty, Betty.

COMRADE. GRIPP: Good morning. Commander-in-Chief, council members, and delegates, at the close of business 4:00 p.m. yesterday, July 29th, 2024, the total delegates registering their credentials, 1,945.

Delegate strength, delegates, 8,807; department commanders, 46; total past commander-in-chief, 15; national officers, 52. Grand total, 8,920. That is my report, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you, Betty, for your outstanding work. Before we get under day -- underway today, we will be remiss not to acknowledge a harrowing event that took place on this date 79 years ago.

Here with more is Adjutant General Dan West.

REMEMBERING USS INDIANAPOLIS
BY ADJUTANT GENERAL DAN WEST

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Comrades, today we're going to remember the USS Indianapolis CA-35. And thanks to the Arizona council member, Jeffrey, for bringing that to our attention.

After delivering the components of the nuclear bombs to the island of Tinian, the USS Indianapolis was ordered to join the rest of the fleet in the Philippine Sea in preparation for the invasion of Japan.

Captain McVay requested a destroyer escort, which was denied by the Pacific Command, and the Indianapolis left as ordered. While en route, as ordered, at approximately 0015 on July 30th, 1945, Japanese submarine I-58 launched six torpedoes at the USS Indianapolis, with two hitting their mark.

The ship with 1,195 sailors and Marines sank in under 15 minutes with approximately 300 men. Approximately 917 entered the water to be exposed to dehydration, saltwater poisoning, and shark attacks. Four days after the sinking, a PBV plane spotted the survivors and radioed for help, starting the frantic rescue.

When all the remaining survivors were rescued, there were only 316 remaining. Of those 316 heroes, only one is still alive today, Harold Bray. On a final note, the wreckage of the USS Indianapolis CA-35 was found more than 70 years later on August 19th, 2017, confirmed by video and photographic evidence.

The Department of Defense has classified the exact location secret and designated the area as hallowed waters.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Gallantry in action, above -- above and beyond the call of duty, risk of life, selflessness, exemplary action, unwavering devotion, extraordinary heroism. The words enshrined within Medal of Honor citations capture the best of humanity.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT
SSG DAVID G. BELLAVIA

COMMANDER IN CHIEF SARMIENTO: Our next guest enlisted in the U.S. Army as an infantryman in 1999.

As the grand -- as the grandson of a World War II Bronze Star recipient, he had a sense of duty instilled in him since he was a young age. Having served deployments to Kosovo and Iraq, it was an event during his deployment to Iraq in 2004, on his 29th birthday, no less, that would change his life forever, earning him the Distinguished Medal of Honor.

Staff Sergeant David G. Bellavia distinguished himself by acts of gallantry above and beyond the call of duty on November 10th, 2004, while serving as a squad leader in support of Operation Phantom Fury in Fallujah, Iraq. While clearing a house, a squad from his platoon became trapped within a room by intense enemy fire coming from a fortified position under the stairs leading to the second floor.

Recognizing the immediate severity of the situation and with disregard for his own safety, Bellavia engaged the insurgents and with enemy rounds impacting around him, he fired at the enemy and provided covering fire that allowed the squad to break contact and next exit the house.

A Bradley Fighting Vehicle was brought forward to suppress the enemy. However, due to the high walls surrounding the house, it could not fire directly at enemy positions. Staff Sergeant Bellavia then reentered the house and again came under intense enemy fire.

He observed an enemy insurgent preparing to launch a rocket-propelled grenade at his platoon. Recognizing the grave danger the grenade posed to his soldiers, he assaulted the enemy position, killing one insurgent, and wounding another, who ran to a different part of the house.

Realizing he had an unclear, darker room to his back, moved to clear it. As he entered, an insurgent came down the stairs, firing him. Simultaneously, the previous wounded insurgent reemerged and engaged Staff Sergeant Bellavia.

Entering further into the darkened room, he returned fire and eliminated both insurgents. He then received enemy fire from another insurgent emerging from a closet in the darkened room. Exchanging gunfire, he pursued the enemy up the stairs and eliminated him.

Now on the second floor, Staff Sergeant Bellavia moved to a door that opened onto the roof. At this point, a fifth insurgent leapt from the third-floor roof onto the second-floor roof. He engaged the insurgent through a window, wounding him in the back of the legs and he caused him to fall off the roof.

Acting on instinct to save the members of his platoon from immediate threat, Staff Sergeant Bellavia ultimately cleared an entire enemy fieldhouse, destroyed four insurgents, and badly wounded a fifth. It was Staff Sergeant Bellavia's heroic intervention and selfless actions that single-handedly saved the lives of his squad, giving his brother in arms a chance to break contact and reorganize when trapped by overwhelming insurgent fire.

On June 5th, 2019, he was justly awarded the Medal of Honor by then-President Trump. We're honored that he's here with us today. Please welcome Life Member of VFW Post 1483, a true American hero, Medal of Honor

recipient, Staff Sergeant David Bellavia.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: All rise. And salute. Take your seats.

COMRADE. BELLAVIA: Thank you. Thank you. I appreciate that. You know, listen, just a little -- allow this point of personal privilege, if you would.

I was in Charlotte, North Carolina, for seven hours, and flight's a little crazy. People ask me all the time, "What can the VFW do?" Run the Department of Transportation, please. We are struggling. We are struggling.

All I want to do is be around veterans, and all I want to do is thank combat veterans for raising me the way you raised me. I grew up in a town in Western New York outside of Buffalo.

Hold your applause for Buffalo. Thank you.

Unbelievable.

By the way, there's more members of the VFW from Wyoming than actually live in Wyoming. How is that possible? I noticed that. In my hometown, veterans were put on pedestals. We're the hometown of John Basilone, Buffalo, New York. Veterans walked around.

They looked you in the eyes. They weren't people that knocked up their girlfriends or couldn't get into college. They were men and women. They were Americans. They were patriots. Parents took their kids and said, "Look at that. That's what I want you to be."

My grandfather is still with me. Thank God. He's 104 and he's a Normandy veteran. And he's a -- yeah. He told stories to an 8-year-old that should never be told to an 8-year-old. But man, I was ready, and I got a chance to meet the Vietnam generation. And let me tell you something about Vietnam Veterans.

First of all, thank you for winning your war that civilians lost. Thank you for fighting. Thank you -- thank you for building this organization. Thank you for fixing the VA. And thank you for handing us a better country than you were given. And most importantly, Vietnam Veterans, thank you for protecting us from the pink-haired baristas that attacked your valor when you came home.

Thank you for standing up for your grandkids and your children and loving us in a way that you weren't loved. Now, I want you to look around this room right now. Look to your left and look to your right. What do you see? I'll tell you what. If Hamas is coming, they ain't coming here. I promise you. I promise you. I see diversity. I see dignity. I see decency.

I don't need to advertise inclusion in the United States Military. Inclusion is called leadership. That's what we do. We don't have to advertise our equity and our diversity, because that's what we're told to do. It's our oath. We swear an oath under God that we will treat people with dignity and respect not because it's for Facebook likes or because it helps us get nominated for a political office, we do it because it's our obligation to do.

That's who we are as veterans.

Now, I'm told -- I'm told that there are even members of the Air Force in this room. And I want to say -- I want to tell you from the bottom of my heart, all the rivalries, when those 2,500 bombs -- God bless you and your parents for making you. I -- I want to thank you from the bottom -- you -- there are so many children that have moms and dads today because of what you've done for this country, what you represent.

And I'm going to tell you something about the VFW. The VFW is relevant. The VFW has overwhelming -- how many politicians lining up to come in here? No one's messing with the VFW. The VFW is the last line of defense when it comes to veterans. And I'll tell you when I -- I was in the 1st Infantry Division in Iraq.

Thank you. Hold your applause for that.

It's The Big Red One. Do you -- does your -- does your division have a movie with Luke Skywalker in it? No, it does not. Does anyone question why Lee Marvin is a 62-year-old staff sergeant? Does anyone -- why is that man in charge of a squad at that age?

Here's my -- my -- my -- when -- when I look, we got into our first fight, we were combat veterans. And our leadership did -- and if there's anyone watching this in the active military, every -- every one of your soldiers and Airmen and Marines do what you -- they did to us in the 1st Infantry Division, force them all to be lifetime members of the VFW the first time they're shot at.

I'll tell you what, there's nothing cooler -- there's -- there is -- there's nothing cooler than walking into a VFW when you've earned it. And you can look at the men who were your baseball coaches, the -- the -- the -- the soldiers that were your teachers, the people that all you wanted to do was make them proud of you, and they turn around and say, thank you.

Thank you for carrying on the legacy of what it is to be an American. We're all different. We disagree. We cancel each other's votes. But look at us. Look at what we represent. Let me tell you something. The Vietnam generation has served their country at war and at peace, and now a new generation has taken over the VFW.

And here's what I can promise you about my friends from Afghanistan and Iraq. We are aggressive. We are

earnest, but we have a true north, and we will keep our true north. We will represent the blood that has been shed for this country, but we are not afraid. We are not afraid to put a boot in a chest if we have stupidity and ignorance in Washington, D.C., and in your state capitol.

We will do it. Let that be a warning. And as we go into a political season and everyone's talking their politics, I just heard the North Carolina Governor dropped out of the race to be VP. And after spending eight hours in Charlotte Airport, I agree, sir, it's time to look on to other things.

But every -- every -- in a political season, we become props. Veterans become -- we bring up the veteran. The veteran tells a story and we're trying to get something out of you. Get something out of you.

Here's what we know right now. We know that confidence in the United States military is at a 20-year low. We know that recruiting is cratered. We know right now that when we tell parents to give us their sons and daughters to serve the greatest country that God has ever created, they tell us, we don't believe that you will love our kids like we love them back.

We at the VFW can change that. We can change the way service is interpreted. We are going to change the way parents look -- listen, did -- how many -- you served, your dad served, your mom served, your uncle served. It's a family business for how many Americans?

Everyone should want to serve their country. Everyone should stand up and salute that flag. And everyone should be outraged when someone takes down the American flag at Union Station and puts up a terrorist flag while we still have American hostages held.

And the proxies that put that flag up, they've killed hundreds of Marines and soldiers in 20 years in a global war on terror. That shouldn't just disgust the VFW, it should disgust America. So here's how we change it. We change it by telling young people not just what you did when you got a bad haircut in Georgia.

And some of you, by the way, evidently, went back to Georgia. I forgive you. We tell them what we did when we came home. We tell them about what we did when we came home, because when you're a member of the VFW, you're a two-time volunteer.

You served your country in uniform and now you're serving your country right now.

I remember. From the bottom of my heart, I -- I thank you for what you represent, what you've done for America, how you raised me. I'm an example of my leadership. I'm an example of the valor, of -- of -- of what I'm looking at right now.

You taught us how to fight. You taught us how to serve. You taught us how to be citizens. And now we are going to take what you taught us and we're going to take the VFW and bring it to a level that has never been seen in American history, where every -- every adult will be shamed when they dishonor your service.

Anyone in Washington, D.C., that wants to use service and put that for political talking points or for a vote, we're going to stare them in the eyes. And here's the power of the VFW. Here is the secret sauce. The mutant ability of veterans that have gone to war.

You can't look at them in the eyes unless you've been there yourself.

No one knows your story unless you tell them your story. And what is your story about? What, you wanted to go to college that bad that you were willing to kick down a door? Were your student loans that bad that you would drive down a road with IEDs on it?

Did you go into villages in South Vietnam looking for Chinese communists? Because why? Because you needed healthcare? You fought because you loved. You didn't hate the enemy. You loved the person to your left and right. You loved your country; you loved your way of life. That's why you're here right now.

In a world of berets, we are rocking the garrison cap for life. That's who the VFW is.

We fight -- we fight so our children never have to. We fight for one day when our kids and our enemy's children can discuss their differences without picking up a rifle and shooting at each other. And until that day comes, we will intimidate the hell out of you if you threaten American citizens.

We will ruin your day. And if you want to fight against the United States of America, the best-case scenario is it ends with a limp and a speech impediment.

I'm telling you what, that's who we are. That's our promise to you older veterans that served and led us and taught us how to lead. We're going to show you what mentors you were. We're going to do that to the next generation. We're going to remind young people that America is still worthy of any sacrifice, because that's what dad taught us and grandpa taught us.

And we are going to teach American civilians how to conduct themselves as American civilians. We can disagree. We don't have to get stupid. And if you want to get stupid, you want VFW members in the room when people get stupid. I promise you, it'll end quickly.

God bless you. God bless your service. God bless the VFW.

And may God have mercy on anyone stupid enough to challenge the United States Army in a field of battle.
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: If you're still hungover and you ain't fired up by now, I don't know what the hell wrong with you.

PRESENTATION: BIEDRZYCKI ACCREDITED SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE AWARD
TO GERALD "JERRY" KAYROUZ, VFW POST 1170-KY

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: With predatory claim sharks threatening veterans' hard-earned benefits, the work our VA accredited service officers do day in and day out. The military and veterans' families and the benefits they earned are paramount.

Our next award recipient is someone, for the last 22 years, has made helping our veterans his top priority.
Jerry Kayrouz. Did I say that right?

Kayrouz? I mean, they even phonetically put it. I'm like, Kayrouz?

Jerry Kayrouz, a Louisville native and VFW life member of Post 1170, is an Air Force veteran who has also served in the Kentucky Army National Guard. In 1991, he deployed to Saudi Arabia with the 438th MP Company as part of Operation Desert Storm.

Jerry joined the VFW in 1992 and was appointed to the VFW Department of Kentucky Service Office in August of 2001, first as an assistant service officer, then later as a department service officer.

In the past year, Jerry almost single-handedly ran the department service officer due to turnover in staff, ensuring veterans and their families continue to receive the high-quality service they deserved.

Though he was covered -- covering a busy office with little support, Jerry still found the time to conduct several schools of instruction and provide mentorship to Kentucky's District and Post-service officers. His work has helped Kentucky veterans recoup more than \$95 million in VA benefits in the last fiscal year, with nearly 400,000 in new benefits awarded.

After 22 years of faithful and enduring service to the department, he proudly retired in June of 2024.

Jerry, thank you for your commitment, perseverance, and your unwavering dedication to our nation's service members, veterans, and their families.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in congratulating from right here in the beautiful city of Louisville, the 2024 John A. Biedrzycki Accredited Service Officer Representative of the Year, Jerry Kayrouz.

Joining with me is Bette Jean Biedrzycki. Her husband, Past Commander-in-Chief John Biedrzycki, is who this award is named after. And, Bette Jean, thank you for joining us today.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: John A. Biedrzycki Accredited Service Representative of the Year, 2023-2024, presented to Gerald "Jerry" Kayrouz, State Service Officer, VFW Department of Kentucky, and special recognition of exemplary achievements in support of the veteran 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 Kentucky, 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 on the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 30th day of July 2024, signed by Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento and Dan West, Adjutant General.

PRESENTATION/REMARKS: DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL AND CITATION
TO PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF TIMOTHY BORLAND

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I'm pleased to introduce our next guest, and he's no stranger to any of you. A man who has served at VFW for more than two decades and someone I consider a true friend.

I mean that. I ain't here -- I ain't here to blow smoke up your ass. I mean that as a true friend of mine.

Timothy M. Borland served the United States Army from 1979 to 2007 with service in Korea and Iraq. He became a Life Member in 2000, (cough) excuse me, and currently maintains his Gold Legacy Life membership at VFW Post 9972 in Sierra Vista, Arizona.

Is Gene here? Gene? It's a dry heat, Gene. It's a dry heat.

Dedicating -- to ensuring the VFW continues to grow, he has earned the title of Elite Recruiter for 21 consecutive years and counting.

He was VFW Department of Arizona Commander from 2011 to 2012, in which he not only achieved All-

American, but also received a distinguished Triple Crown Award.

Tim became the first Iraq War veteran to lead our organization. And it was under his leadership the most historic piece of legislation this century was passed, the 2022 Honoring our PACT Act. He is a respected leader and under the direction of the VFW, experienced strong growth and impressive forward momentum.

Today, he remains wholeheartedly dedicated to the VFW mission.

I am truly honored to present him with the Distinguished Service Award.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Distinguished Service Medal and citation awarded to Timothy M. Borland. In lasting appreciation and spirited recognition of his more than two decades of stalwart service and dedication to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

Through his commitment to advocacy efforts and genuine support of our nation's veterans, service members, and their families, he worked diligently to further the VFW mission while successfully fulfilling roles as Department Commander, National Council of Administration member, member of multiple National Committees, and ultimately as Commander-in-Chief, the pinnacle of VFW achievement. His steadfast dedication to the values of the VFW has left a lasting mark on the organization and has earned him our deepest respect and appreciation.

His unyielding service to the veteran community and his truly admirable commitment to the VFW mission has justly earned him the highest level of admiration and gratitude of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

And witness whereof we have here unto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 30th day of July 2024, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief and Dan West, Adjutant General.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Good morning VFW.

I'll tell you right now, it's hard to follow that Medal of Honor recipient. What a story, very good enthusiasm, got you guys all riled up; I thought that was just neat. I love how he continued to bring up the VFW in his speech, because I'll tell you right now, there's no more truth than what he said that when we -- when we're out and about, don't get in our way.

Such as membership, for those of you that know me, I never stop recruiting, never stop recruiting, it's because I love the VFW. I did 28 years in the Army and now 24 in the VFW, and the only reason why it's -- and the only reason why it's only 24 is because for 20 years, I never heard of the VFW when I was in the service.

Never once in -- in my first 20 years of my 28-year history, heard about the VFW. And when I did, I joined Post 9972 in Sierra Vista, Arizona as a life member and I have never transferred.

My loyalty will always be with that Post because that Post is the one that brought me into the VFW. So I challenge all of you on this floor, all of you on this floor, recruit one this year for your incoming Commander-in-Chief, and I guarantee you that's going to help the numbers, at least by 1 or 2 percent right off the bat.

Let those veterans out there -- especially the active-duty military veterans out there -- let them know that they are veterans, too, if they have deployed overseas to Iraq, Afghanistan, Desert Storm, Africa, wherever there is an expeditionary medal, hopefully Poland, if we can get that resolution signed into law, so we can get the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal awarded to over 20,000 National Guard Troops and Reserve individuals that served over there since February of 2022.

So VFW, I challenge you to recruit one; if you recruit one this convention, come up and tell me, I want to hear about it. Thank you, Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento for this honor.

Thank you, Veterans of Foreign Wars for the honor of letting me serve.

God bless our troops and God bless America.

Thank you.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: MILITARY ORDER OF THE COOTIE SUPREME COMMANDER MARK LARKIN

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: A trip to almost any VA hospital will reveal the important work of the Military Order of the Cootie.

Each year the Cooties spend thousands of hours bringing comfort and laughs to our hospitalized veterans. They keep them smiling in beds of white, a grand tribute to the service and sacrifice of all veterans.

Our next guest was elected Supreme Commander of the Military Order of the Cootie last July. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome, in Cootie fashion, the Supreme Commander of the Military Order of the Cootie United States of America, Mark Larkin from the great State of North Carolina.

Boo. Stop. Wow. Firsts off, start off -- woo. Woo.

SUPREME COMMANDER LARKIN: Chief, don't go anywhere. On behalf of the Cooties, we heard that you like

to drink beer.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I'm not a big drinker.

SUPREME COMMANDER LARKIN: Not a big drinker, but you like to drink beer when it's time to drink.

So from my heart and the Cooties' heart to you, we bought you this mini keg. Some of you may know what it is, it's a square keg, but I did have it personally embossed for you.

It says, "To Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief, Veterans of the Foreign Wars 2023-2024, AKA Military Order of the Cootie, Supreme Overwatch. Meet the challenge from me, Supreme Commander Military Order of the Cootie, AKA SSS. Scouting for Comrades." All the other parts are down there in a box.

Is it boo or is it woo? All right. I'm getting older, so I got to pull out my glasses.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I know that's you (inaudible).

SUPREME COMMANDER LARKIN: Thank you, comrades. Thank you, Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento.

You'll never know what it feels like to be standing on this stage until you're doing it. You know, all the things -- it took me an entire year to figure out what I was going to say when I got up here, and I still have no clue what I'm going to say when I got up here.

We had a hell of a year, did we not?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Yes, sir. We did.

SUPREME COMMANDER LARKIN: So we got through the honoring you gift.

First off, I want to start -- may I address the comrades?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Absolutely.

SUPREME COMMANDER LARKIN: How many Cooties we got out there? If you're a Cootie, stand up. If you're a Cootie, stand up. I want to let you know this is the same theme around the country. For those of you that may not be standing up -- you can go ahead and sit down, Cooties -- that there's a good about 50 percent of the comrades that are here today that are Cooties.

That doesn't surprise me, us being the Supreme Cooties and being the honor decreed the VFW has chartered in -- in the bylaws -- of the Article XII of your bylaws.

What is amazing to me is that we make up less than 1 percent of the VFW population, but over 50 percent are here as your workforce. Your workforce is comprised of 50 percent of the Cooties, if not more.

Now, I will tell you -- I want to tell you about all the great things the Cooties did for you, but I don't want to stand up here and tell you a bunch of -- of bullshit. He gave me the ring.

But -- because statistics are boring. Nobody wants to tell you all the great things that we did, you may not even want to hear them. But I will tell you, for the first time in a very long time, that the Cooties have reported 100 percent inspection reports for the year; that is an amazing feat for anybody.

And again, I won't stand up here and tell you all the great things we did, it's like I won't tell you that we instituted 11 new Pup Tents across this great nation.

And, you know, yesterday we heard from the gentleman that made the movie, Brothers at War, and we all saw that trailer. And he felt compelled because he had heard that we -- that during the last 20 years, service members, 6,700 had died in the last 20 years in combat.

But 120,000 of our brothers and sisters felt it necessary to take their own life. We felt compelled to do something about it, so did your Cooties. The Cooties, we came up with a program called the Big Boot program. And the Big Boot program is geared to everything about PTSD and suicide awareness.

And it wasn't about fundraising, because anybody can throw money at an -- at an issue and it not do anything. So what we did, what I charged those Cooties to do, those that are in independent Pup Tents and all Grands to do at least one event this year geared towards the idea of suicide awareness, veteran suicide awareness and PTSD.

The response was overwhelming. I can't tell you how many events we did over the year. Now, that's a statistic I won't tell you because I don't know it. But the Big Boot program was so successful that my successor plans on doing it again. Robbie Norman will be up here next year doing this and telling you what we did for veteran suicide. Like in the great State of North Carolina, we did a Supreme Strides, we found a one -- we found a lake that had a one-mile track, we did 22 miles around there.

I didn't make all 22, I will be honest, but I know a lot of you know Victor Letourneau from North Carolina, he -- he gives me crap every time he sees me, "Couldn't do it, could you?" But --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Did Victor do it?

SUPREME COMMANDER LARKIN: Victor did all 22.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I want to see the video.

SUPREME COMMANDER LARKIN: Commander-in-Chief, we are meeting the challenge. When you put that out, I want to let you know that the Cooties met the challenge. I came up with the theme of scouting for comrades, and

the reason I came up with it -- with that idea was to reunite and get us back together, the MOC and the VFW.

So I put a challenge out to our Cooties to recruit as many new comrades as we could. We have 9,628 Cooties, but we met the challenge this year, Chief. We recruited 10,428 new comrades; this is what your Cooties did for your VFW, we did that for you.

Now, the MOC, our motto is "Keep them smiling on beds of white." The previous year we did over \$8 million worth of credit towards hospital work. And this year, through our new reporting system, and with the help of our auxiliary, we did an amazing over \$18 million in hospital work for this year.

And what does that mean to us, comrades and Cooties, what does that mean? That means those -- that is how much we got in the face of other veterans; we were one-on-one with those veterans that needed our help. And your Cooties did that in the name of the VFW and the name of the -- the Military Order of the Cootie.

Now, that brings me to a story, and I want to tell you this story and it won't be long, Dan, I know I'm going a little overtime. I mean, it won't be long. It brings me to a story I've told many times at -- in North Carolina. There is a Gunnery Sergeant, his name is Chuck Pay (phonetic).

Now, Charlie Pay is a -- is -- you-all may remember this, when somebody says about a soldier, now that's a soldier's soldier, now that's a sailor's sailor, now that's a airman's airman. I will tell you that Gunnery Sergeant Pay was a marine's marine through and through.

A Vietnam veteran, not only was he a marine's marine, he was a gunnery sergeant's gunny, and for those Marines that know what I'm talking about, you know exactly what I'm talking about. Well, a few years back, Chuck had a massive stroke, left him half-paralyzed on the left side, or partially paralyzed on the left side.

Couldn't speak, slurred his words. And the Cooties -- five or six Cooties and two or three VFW comrades and auxiliary members and some other civilians, we found out that in order for him to get into his house, he had one cinder block to -- to traverse 3 feet to get in the sliding door of his house.

When he had the massive stroke, he could no longer do that, so with the help of another organization, the Cooties and the VFW comrades, we went out there and we built them -- built him some lazy steps.

I will tell you that Gunnery Sergeant Pay is a very big man, big ham hocks for hands. But when you walked up to him and you could see him barely walk and he could barely put his hands over his head, and he couldn't barely speak, he almost sounded like the town drunk.

But when we got done, we were all cleaning up. Unbeknownst to us as we were cleaning up, he walked out, he walked down those steps on his own volition and he raised his hands above his head and he said, "I am no longer handicapped. I am no longer handicapped."

As loud and proud and as clear as you could possibly think. And the tears running that man's eyes made ten or 12 other grown men sit there and cry, and yes, North Carolina, not once, but twice. But that is the -- that is the self-satisfaction of being a Cootie and helping those veterans and helping those Marines and sailors and -- and airmen and soldiers, helping them is what we do.

We do it best, no one does more for veterans and we keep them smiling on beds of white. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Comrades, I would ask those that are not Cooties to highly consider it. I was a latecomer into the Cooties. I've been a member of this organization 30-some years, I think we joined, Jeff, what, five -- eight years ago, six years ago.

Out of Delaware, proud 3rd Degree out of Delaware, by the way, but now I belong to the Pacific Areas.

And look, let me tell you, it opened my eyes to see what they did. We didn't have a Pup Tent in my Post or nothing, but, you know, in New Jersey it's -- it's not the strongest. But when I saw the work that they did, it opened my eyes and that's why I -- I joined not to say I was a Cootie, I joined because I wanted to be a part of it.

So I ask you if you're not a member, check it out and -- and see, you'll see the great work they're doing and absolutely want to be -- and I -- I truly think in your heart, you're going to say, man, I want to be a part of this.

Thanks, Mark.

ANNOUNCEMENT: LEGACY LIFE PROCLAMATIONS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: When you make the choice to become a Legacy Life member, you are choosing to not only gain access to exclusive benefits, but you are also showcasing to the world that you believe in and support the vital work that the VFW does.

For the VFW, our Legacy Life members have the opportunity to do just that. Membership in this fraternity is comprised and renowned and committed to VFW members. Their marks left on our organization and the veteran and military community are unrivaled.

And when -- we can't thank each of you enough for your dedication and support.

Today, I'm pleased to recognize a couple of 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, Billy Simpson Post 470 in Erie, Pennsylvania. Bunny--Bunting-McWilliams Post 658 in Macon, Georgia. Owensboro Post 696 in Owensboro, Kentucky.

The Fred Needham Post 2669 in Port Orchard, Washington. The Tidewater Post 4809 in Norfolk, Virginia. Wayne F. East Post 4820 in Port Nech -- Neches, Texas. Where are you, Texas where are you? Oh, back there.

Valentine Post 5138 in Valentine, Nebraska. Private Allen J. Beck, Junior Post 5265 in Spring Grove, Pennsylvania.

Ravenna Post 5820 in Ravenna, Nebraska.

Staff Sergeant James B. Dennis Post 6018 in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

Myerstown Memorial Post 6076 in Myerstown, Pennsylvania.

Jimmy Harris Post 6837 in Boaz, Alabama -- Boaz.

Daniel B. Persyn Memorial Post 7108 Helotes, Texas -- Helotes, Texas.

Wake Forest Memorial Post 8466 in Wake Forest, North Carolina.

Sustina -- Sustina Post 9365 in Wasilla, Alaska.

North Hardin Post 10281 in Vine Grove, Kentucky.

And Tower Post 10692 in Grafenwohr, Germany.

With 50 Legacy Life members, Cecil County Memorial Post 6027 in Northeast Maryland. Best crabs down in Northeast by the way too, if you're ever down there, great crabs.

With 75 Legacy Life members, Walter E. Brown Post 21 in Connellsville, Pennsylvania.

Finally, it is my honor to present the Legacy Life Post Proclamation to Wheeler-Young Post 201 in Waterbury, Connecticut for having a 100 Legacy Life members.

And then the other one goes to the Robert W. Zaher Post 2485 in Angeles City, Philippines for a -- this is a little wrong, they're up to 179 Legacy Life members, and they tell me they're going to hit 200 by the end of this year.

Please welcome to the stage, representatives from Posts 201 and 2485.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: 2023-2024 ELITE RECRUITERS OF THE YEAR

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Before we name the 2024 National Recruiter of the Year, I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge some very important men and women who have worked hard day in and day out to accomplish the vital recruiting mission of this 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 and collectively they were responsible for increasing our ranks by an impressive 2,665 members. Please stand as your name is called to be recognized.

With 827 members recruited, Tim Borden from VFW Post 9972 in Sierra Vista, Arizona.

I don't know him. I don't know him.

With 402 members recruited, Judy King from VFW Post 2695 in Shelbyville, Indiana. Hey, Judy.

With 340 members recruited, Ed Stefanak from VFW Post 9539 in Roebuck, South Carolina.

With 309 members recruited, Michael Boll from VFW Post 2433 in Union in the great state of New Jersey.

With 275 members recruited, Dwayne Kilbourne from VFW Post 5408 Acworth, Georgia.

With 256 members recruited, Joseph Allen from VFW Post 3285 in Frederick, Maryland.

With 256 members recruited, Lamar Pounds from VFW Post 256 in Lehigh, Pennsylvania. I'm sorry, I'm just going by what it says. Let me -- it's Georgia?

I'm going to read this again. You're Lamar?

I'm just going by what's in the book, I apologize. It's the little things, it's the little -- let me tell you, you die of a thousand cuts, trust me.

And with 256 members recruited, Lamar Pounds from VFW Post 256 [sic] in Lehigh, [sic] Georgia.

Yes? It's the little things. Great job this year, ladies and gentlemen, please give these efforts a well-deserved round of applause.

PRESENTATION: 2023-2024 NATIONAL RECRUITER OF THE YEAR TO STEVEN L. WOODWARD, VFW POST 2224-WA

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Last July I told you I was setting the bar higher, that we had to push harder to achieve membership goals. I challenged you to up your recruiting game this year, knowing we had an uphill battle to fight, and boy did you deliver.

Now, I'm pleased to announce our 2024 VFW National Recruiter of the Year, a Life member from Post 2224 from the great State of Washington, Stephen L. Woodward.

Now, you may recognize Steve, as he was right here on this spot last year. His success in recruiting a -- a remarkable 913 new and reinstated members nearly doubled how many he recruited last year, truly speaks for itself.

His determination, dedication and hard work is a great example for us all and reminds us that the future leaders of our organization are out there, we just got to touch them.

Please join me in giving a huge round of applause for the 2024 National Recruiter of the Year Comrade Stephen L. Woodward.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: National Recruiter of the Year Award for 2023, 2024 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 VFW 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.

And witness whereof, we have here unto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States this 30th day of July 2024, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief and Dan West, Adjutant General.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: For those of you who didn't know the person was standing up here with the cell phone recording, that was Paul Herrera. Paul, where -- you know, it's -- it's an inside joke between me and Paul.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: DIRECTOR OF DEFENSE POW/MIA ACCOUNTING AGENCY,
MAJOR GENERAL (RET) KELLY MCKEAGUE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: For more than 50 years the United States Department of Defense has dedicated time, personnel, and resources to the sole mission of accounting for Americans listed as prisoners of war or missing in action.

What began with the 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 officers, and other subordinate units, given the responsibility of accounting for those missing from all past wars and conflicts.

Today, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, established in 2015, carries on that mission around the world, devoted to an insurmountable task of accounting for the presently 81,500 missing Americans. Just this year, DPAA accounted for more than 100 American service members lost in World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

This success was a result of the countless hours spent and tireless efforts of the more than 700 Defense Department uniformed and civilian personnel that make up the world-class workforce of this organization.

Through a partnership that has lasted for decades, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is honored to walk alongside this great agency in helping to fulfill our nation's promise to bring all Americans missing home. And I might add, we are the only veteran service organization to return to Southeast Asia annually in support of the full accounting mission.

Please join in me -- please join me in welcoming to our 125th National Convention, the man who has been a leader in the Defense POW/MIA accounting efforts for more than ten years and a true friend of the VFW, Director of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, U.S. Air Force Reserve retired Major General Kelly McKeague.

MAJOR GENERAL MCKEAGUE: Good morning, Commander-in-Chief Sarmiento, Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Lipphardt, and most importantly, distinguished veterans. I'm deeply honored to share in this celebration of your 125th National Convention.

It certainly is about celebrating, celebrating a legacy and what a legacy it is. Speaking of legacy, I salute your Commander-in-Chief for the unparalleled passion he has infused in his leadership of this great organization.

Chief, if ever this country has an energy crisis, all we need to do is plug him into the electrical grid. As proud as I am of serving in the -- our United States Air Force for 34 years and ten years serving this noble mission, I am prouder to be the son of a U.S. Army enlisted soldier and infantry man who served one combat tour in Korea, and God

rest his soul, two combat tours in Vietnam.

My family was blessed because he came home, like all of you did. Searching for, recovering and identifying Americans missing from past Wars is a sacred obligation. Just as all your national leaders have visited our deployed teams in Southeast Asia, here you see your Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore in Vietnam helping to recover the remains of a missing U.S. airman.

Carol, thank you for your visit. Distinguished veterans, this is a sacred obligation because it involves your comrades in arms. And it's a moral imperative because they made the supreme sacrifice on behalf of the country we love, and because their Gold Star families deserve to have them home. The POW/MIA mission is global in nature; we go wherever Americans fell in battle, from World War II through Operation Iraqi Freedom.

It's also generational because second and third-generation family members still carry a void in life and heart, longingly hoping that their loved one comes home.

As you can see here, and as the Chief mentioned, the numbers of MIAs are staggering. Even if you consider just the 38,000 that we estimate to be recoverable, these numbers, together with the passage of time, are the enemies we battle today. I'll note that the reason the numbers of MIAs come down from war to war is because our military got better at recovering personnel when they fell in battle.

This noble mission benefits greatly from the recognition and cooperation of 46 countries, all helping us towards this humanitarian endeavor that tangibly manifests the people-to-people ties. This very day, we have 265 men and women deployed in 12 countries from Vietnam, Laos, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, England, France, Germany, Italy, Austria, Croatia, and Poland.

And in two weeks, we will send a team to China, whose cooperation was restored this past January, despite the bilateral tensions.

Sadly there is one exception, and that uncooperative country is North Korea. The reason why this is a travesty is because of the 7,400 Americans missing from the Korean War, 5,300 lie in North Korea, where we have not had access to try to recover them since 2005.

I will say there was hope back in 2018, you'll remember when I spoke to you, after your Commander-in-Chief, Keith Harman, wrote a letter to President Trump, who then inserted into the agreement that he made with Chairman Kim for the recovery and repatriation of remains.

55 boxes came out of that endeavor, and we have not had communication with North Korea since. Here in the U.S., the POW/MIA mission generates strong interest in the halls of Congress, in the communities of America. And this is a direct result of the VFW's staunch advocacy at all levels, nationally, at Departments and at Posts.

Ladies and gentlemen, while the numbers of MIAs are daunting, they are so much more than just figures. Each has a unique story, with memories that their families treasure and carry through generations. It's important to share one such story with you and to place a face against this sacred mission.

This is Marine Corps Captain Ron Forrester, a Texan from Odessa and a Texas A&M graduate. He and his identical twin brother, Don, who is 77 today are pictured here as young boys in Odessa. Captain Forrester was an A-6A bombardier navigator who was shot down over North Vietnam at the age of 25, two days after Christmas, 1972.

Over the years, multiple teams investigated and excavated Vietnamese ground in search of Captain Forrester and his pilot, Marine Captain Ralph Chipman. An unwavering commitment and relentless perseverance led to the discovery last year of bone fragments, teeth, a dog tag and a gas credit card, all of which were used to identify and account for Captains Chipman and Forrester.

I love the photo in the middle, it's from a memorial service in Texas where hundreds attended, family members, Aggies. Speaking, as you see here in the picture, is Captain Forrester's granddaughter Lilian.

Above her, you'll see a photo on the screen of Lilian as a toddler and her young mother, Karoni, who herself was only 2 years old, as you see in the picture. This is the last picture that she had with her father before he went off to combat. As she got older, Karoni was more involved and became a leader in the National League of Families, an organization, which developed the POW/MIA bracelets that we're familiar with, that designed the iconic black and white POW/MIA flag.

Karoni will bury her father at Arlington National Cemetery on October 7th. And because he is identified and now home, the American Battle Monuments Commission -- you heard from their Secretary, Charles Djou yesterday -- they will place a bronze rosette next to his name that is carved in the marble tablets at the Honolulu National Cemetery.

Distinguished veterans, this is why this mission matters and how your appreciation, your support and advocacy of the POW/MIA mission enable us to provide these families, like the Forresters, with answers they have long sought. The VFW's resolute commitment manifests itself in a number of ways.

From flying the POW/MIA flag, to attending the military burials of returned service members, thank you.

For turning in wartime artifacts, which are very meaningful to the hosts nations, thank you. To your national leaders visiting deployed teams in Southeast Asia. Here in the picture, you see former Commander-in-Chief Tim Borland, current Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento, and Executive Director Ryan Gallucci at a site where our team is excavating.

And by the way, your leadership have been visiting our teams since 1991. Thank you. Thank you for your generous donations that come from Posts, Departments to DPAA in our solemn mission. All of this is to say, when it comes to the POW/MIA mission, the VFW lives its motto of doing more for veterans; in this case, these are veterans who never came home.

Through your awareness, through your support that you promote, you walk the walk for your comrades-in-arms who are still missing. Distinguished veterans, the fact that the United States of America vigorously pursues this mission is the right thing to do.

It's a fulfillment of a promise made to those who made the ultimate sacrifice, and to their families. It's also a national commitment to you, their comrades-in-arms, and to those who serve in uniform today, that they will not be forgotten should they go missing.

I'll leave you with a powerful point President Reagan made in a 1982 Memorial Day at Arlington. He said, and I quote, "If words cannot repay the debt we owe them, surely with our actions, we must strive to keep faith with them and with the vision that led them to battle and the final sacrifice."

The actions DPAA do daily around the world on our nation's behalf begin to repay those debts.

You all know this.

On the black and white POW/MIA flag are the words, poignant words, "You are not forgotten."

I can assure you, the Department of Defense has not, will not forget, and thank you for the VFW for also not forgetting.

May God bless our MIAs, may God bless their families and this noble, sacred mission that bring answers to them. And may he shed his grace on each of you, on the VFW, and our great nation. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Comrades. I wanted Kelly to hear this. Yesterday we passed our resolution, sir. Resolution 409 stated full funding.

Now, when we pass these things, it ain't just we pass them.

This is when we go to DC, because sometimes veterans' issues and issues like this becomes the low-hanging fruit when it comes time to cut.

This body, sir, has passed a resolution, which will press our issue to Congress to be sure that your agency is not only increased but fully funded in the future.

I want you to know that, sir, that we stand behind you, like a gazillion percent.

Woo. Woo. Woo.

PRESENTATION: NATIONAL MEMBER OF THE YEAR AWARD
TO SARAH LIVELY, VFW POST 9675-NE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: The VFW Member of the Year recognizes a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars who has exemplified interactions and accomplishments, the true spirit of our organization, in serving the needs of their Post and community and who has dedicated themselves in a professional manner to addressing the pillars of our organization.

This year's recipient demonstrates each facet of this and more.

After retiring from the Air Force, Sarah Lively became a certified -- became certified in advanced yoga practices to support mental and emotional health for military personnel. She opened a yoga studio in 2016, providing free services to military communities and volunteers extensively with Veterans Yoga Project, even donating 25,000 to its foundation.

Sarah is highly motive -- involved in the Boy Scouts of America, serving various leadership roles and volunteering 60 to 80 hours monthly. She also contributes significantly to VFW Post 9675, including making generous donations and overseeing renovations. Her dedication led to her election as Post Commander for the '24-'25 year.

Alongside her volunteer efforts, Sarah works as a contract training evaluator for the VA and is completing her Ph.D. in self -- I don't think I reviewed this, self -- because, you know, it's one of those words again, efficacy?

Efficacy, that's another word that ain't in New Jersey, I'm letting you know that right now.

Like, efficacy, and then the next one, they even -- they even phonetically put this out. Kinesiology, what the hell is that? All right.

Efficacy and kinesiology?

All right. She balances these roles while raising seven children.

They got cable in Oklahoma? Exemplifying her exceptional commitment to both her professional and personal life. Sarah and the work she accomplishes in support of veterans and her community day in and day out, serves as a shining example of what it means to be a VFW member.

It is now truly my honor to proudly present the 2024 -- the 2023-'24 VFW Member of the Year Award to VFW Life Member and newly elected Commander of Post 9675 in Palpapa -- Papillion, Nebraska, Sarah -- Jesus, Sarah Lively.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: National Member of the Year Award presented to Sarah Lively, Sarpy VFW Post 9675 Commander, VFW Department of Nebraska.

In recognition of her exceptional dedication and service and for her outstanding contributions furthering the mission and purpose of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

Her commitment to volunteering, providing free yoga classes to active-duty service members, veterans and first responders at her studio and her partnership with the VA to provide free yoga for PTS/TBI and chronic pain claim clinic patients has had a profound and lasting impact on the lives of many in the military and veteran communities.

As a member of the Nebraska State Governor's Veterans Board, Lively has been the voice for military service members and veterans, promoting veteran initiatives within the State of Nebraska.

Her coordination with other non-profits to host retreats for women veterans and active-duty service members and her role as advancement chair for the local Boy Scout Troop and Council since 2018, demonstrate her unwavering support for her community.

Through her efforts as Post 9675's newly elected -- hours spent helping renovate her post, her time serving as the point of contact for the local cemetery, and her assistance with Buddy Poppy drives and support for community ceremonies are clear evidence of her dedication.

Her unwavering support and commitment to helping veterans and active-duty service members while also mentoring and guiding the youth into becoming civic-minded, patriotic, future leaders has justly earned her the utmost respect, appreciation and gratitude of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

In witness whereof, we have here unto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States this 30th day of July 2024, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief and Dan West, Adjutant General.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: All right. Sarah once again, huge congratulations on that.

PRESENTATION/REMARKS: NATIONAL JROTC CADET OF THE YEAR AWARD
TO AALIYAH JONES

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: The mission of the Air Force Junior Reserve Officer Training Course or JROTC is develop citizens of character dedicated to serving their nation and community.

The citizenship training program is designed to educate and train high school cadets in citizenship, promote community service, instill personal responsibility, character, and self-discipline.

Grounded in the Air Force core values of integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do, the JROTC is the -- is mandated to sustain 870 Air Force Junior ROTC units in high schools worldwide. Nearly 1,600 retired Air Force instructors lead, mentor, guide, and teach some 90,000 cadets in high schools in the U.S. and around the world.

Our next award recipient, cadet Aaliyah Jones out of Oxon Hill High School in Oxon Hill, Maryland is someone who consistently displays the skills and abilities of older cadets. Wing Commander is a role typically reserved for seniors, but she was selected for the position as a junior.

Taking over the Cadet Wing Commander role only six weeks prior to the Unit evaluation, she helped ensure her Unit met or exceeded every standard. Cadet Jones is an excellent student, athlete, class vice president of the student government association, a qualified color guard commander, a member of the Inspector General Staff, and was a member of the Joint Command Staff with other schools.

As a student and future service member, she has set the bar high and remains committed to achieving her goals, with her sights now set on law school and becoming part of the JAG Corps. Now, you guys -- now look, I know you people that got in trouble in the military know the JAG Corps, right, the Judge Advocate General? For all of us that got the Good Conduct Medal you didn't have to -- you know, you may not know what it is.

There is no doubt she has a bright future ahead and our country is lucky to have leaders like her. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in giving a huge round of applause while we congratulate the VFW 2023-'24 JROTC Cadet of the Year, Wing Commander Aaliyah Jones.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps Cadet of the Year Award presented to

Aaliyah Jones in sincere recognition of her exceptional dedication and exemplary service and achievements as a cadet in the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps at Oxon Hill High School.

Her positive attitude, outstanding military bearing, and superior leadership abilities have set a remarkable standard for her peers. Her roles as flight commander, squadron commander, chief of staff, vice wing commander, wing commander, flag detail commander, as well as being a member of the Inspector General Staff, along with her leadership of the fitness program and participation in the color guard, exemplify her dedication and versatility.

Jones' membership in the Joint Command Staff collaborates with multiple schools in involvement with the Summer Cadet Leadership Camp, where she works with more than 200 cadets from 13 different JROTC programs, spotlights her exceptional leadership and teamwork skills.

Maintaining a 4.5 GPA, being a member of the Kitty Hawk Honor Society, serving as a class vice president for three years, and actively participating in basketball, lacrosse and teen court peer mediation demonstrates her outstanding academic, athletic and civic achievements.

Her consistent excellence in all leadership positions and aspiration to join the JAG Corps are testaments to her drive and ambition.

Her dedication to becoming a better leader in her unwavering commitment to excellence are truly commendable, justly earning her the utmost respect and appreciation of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

In witness whereof, we have here unto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States this 30th day of July 2024, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief and Dan West, Adjutant General.

MS. JONES: Good morning.

As I stand here to humbly accept this award I can't help but to think of the day when I am a retired Air Force veteran, gifting this next award to another scholar. I would like to first --

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Oh, you're good.

MS. JONES: Excuse me.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Here, I can -- give me that.

MS. JONES: Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Who the hell put this there?

MS. JONES: I would like to firstly thank my parents in their unwavering support and guidance as I've accumulated through the years of high school, as well as my Junior ROTC instructors, Lieutenant Colonel Branch and Chief Stephen Maynard, as their mentorship has allowed me to expand my leadership spectrum and develop as a cadet.

I would also like to thank the VFW as this prestigious organization has provided nothing but great hospitality and has further inspired me to pursue a career in the Air Force.

Again, thank you and may God bless you all. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: If I had to bet, she's making General, I'm just letting you know; she's making General. She comes from -- what, VFW Post 5471 sponsored her, in Fort Washington, Maryland.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: JOSE GARCIA, SR. VICE PRESIDENT
GOVERNMENT SOLUTIONS, FISERV

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Our newest member and Post benefit relationship is Fiserv, a Fortune 500 company that aspires to move money and information in a way that moves the world.

As a global leader in payments and financial technology, Fiserv helps clients achieve best in class results through a commitment to innovation and excellence and enabling commerce, with a Clover cloud-based point-of-sale business management platform.

With three different Clover point-of-sale offerings and several optional add-ons, Fiserv Solutions have something that will work for every Post.

Now, please welcome to the stage for a special presentation, Fiserv's Senior Vice President of Government Solutions, Jose Garcia.

MR. GARCIA: Fiserv is committed to providing the military community with career opportunities, educational resources, and business solutions.

Through Fiserv Salutes, our dedicated veteran program, we are proud to be the new partner of the VFW. Okay. We at Fiserv appreciate the VFW'S mission, and foster camaraderie with all the veterans.

With this donation, we know this contribution will go to many of the uses that are required within the VFW. So at this time, we'd like to present a \$50,000 check to Duane, and thank you for all your services. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: For those that didn't see, that was a \$50,000 check, that's going to our world renowned NVS Program for the service officers.

We -- we are partnered this year with Fiserv, they have a booth out there. Every Post out here with a canteen should have a point-of-sale system. If you're looking for one, matter of fact, they're -- you guys are giving one away, right?

They're giving two away; you go there and scan the code, they're giving away two Clover point-of-sale systems. And if you have a point-of-sale system and you're paying over 2.2 percent on the credit card transaction, you're getting beat, because they can beat -- they -- that's what they got, just saying.

Jose, thank you so much for Fiserv, we look forward to working more with you.

Thank you.

PRESENTATION/REMARKS: VFW DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD
TO RUN FOR THE WALL, CO-FOUNDER, JAMES "GUNNY" GREGORY, VFW POST-445-SC

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: The VFW Distinguished Service Award recognizes VFW members for exemplary or extraordinary service to our country through demonstrated actions that promote the spirit of the VFW. Recipients exhibit the spirit of a true VFW comrade through volunteer actions in service, companionship and activities to the local community, their state and their nation.

For nearly 40 years our next guest has done just that. Riding his Wild [sic] Glide in a welcome home parade for the Vietnam veterans back in 1986, changed our next guest's life forever. Then, active-duty Marine Corps drill instructor and combat veteran James "Gunny" Gregory walked away from that ride with a purpose that continues to grow tenfold.

And today remains a primary mission of the Run for the Wall, calling for a full accounting of our nation's prisoners of war and those missing in action.

That's it, one Marine said hoo-rah, that was it.

Tell you what, if the Army had to do the thing they do, how many would do that? You know, in the Navy we just go, "Liberty call, liberty call."

You guys can have all your weird sayings all you want, we're just going to go on liberty. Gunny's efforts with the Run For the Wall have evolved into four different ride routes heading to the Vietnam Wall Memorial in Washington, DC and the Middle East Conflicts Wall in Marseilles, Illinois.

The Ridership honors and preserves the memory of our POW and MIAs, paying tribute to their service and healing from their own.

His dedication to ensuring no veteran is left behind has driven the Ride to continued success throughout the years and is the reason the nation's largest and longest organized cross-country motorcycle ride was able to successfully complete its 33rd annual ride last May.

His many contributions, not just to veterans, but to service member and veterans from all eras is why I'm proud to present James "Gunny" Gregory, a Life member of VFW Post 445 with the 2023-'24 VFW Distinguished Service Award.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Distinguished Service Award and Citation awarded to James "Gunny" Gregory, Run for the Wall founder, in lasting appreciation and spirited recognition of his inspiring efforts to preserve and honor the memory of those killed in action, and for his continued perseverance and furthering the mission to account for all prisoners of war and those missing in action through the cross-country motorcycle ride, Run for the Wall.

The dedication and the commitment he has put forth in raising awareness of America's full accounting mission, along with his strive to ensure every Vietnam veteran receives the welcome home they earned and deserved, has made a positive impact in the lives of countless veterans, service members, and military families.

This selfless service to others 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 the United States this 30th day of July 2024, approved by the National Council of Administration, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant General.

COMRADE GREGORY: Hoo-rah.

AUDIENCE: Hoo-rah.

COMRADE GREGORY: Hoo-rah.

AUDIENCE: Hoo-rah.

COMRADE GREGORY: I haven't seen this many combat veterans sitting out in front of me since, what, Bob Hope USO show. All right, Run for the Wall.

Little bit of history. I was a Marine Corps drill instructor in 1989 in MCRD San Diego pushing privates. Don't tell me one of you are out there. Good grief.

I heard about a group. Another Marine veteran, Ray Manzo, started a little ride to Washington, DC called Rolling Thunder. And he says, "Can you come out here?" And I said, "I'm in California. The only way I can get to DC is by a motorcycle."

I wanted to go to the wall, the -- the original Vietnam Vet Memorial. So I started asking around. Turns out there were quite a few veterans who wanted to go to that wall who happened to ride motorcycles. And so we rode.

But one of those reasons I had to get there, and I am part of the Mayaguez rescue. For those who are not familiar, after Saigon fell in April of '75, a U.S. American container ship was hijacked by the Khmer Rouge, the Cambodians, 14, 15-year-olds with

AK-47s and RPGs. Our president, President Ford at the time, two weeks after Vietnam fell, said, "Send in the Marines."

So my battalion left Okinawa, landed at U-Tapao Air Force Base -- Royal Air Force Base. Several Air Force Jolly Greens took a bunch of us. I personally did not land on the island, I have to correct myself there. Took a bunch of my Marines to an island called Koh Tang.

Landed right at sunrise and literally got the shit kicked out of us. Intel was horrible. 41 Americans died rescuing 39 civilians. Unfortunately, as night fell and the last choppers that were flyable, shot up really bad, and I will give the Air Force all the credit in the world because a bunch of green Air Force pilots got the last of those Marines off the island.

Unfortunately three of them on the machine gun team were left behind, alive. Those three Marines break my heart. Now earlier the general was talking about, we have been doing all these efforts to find their remains.

These guys, we -- we really have not found their remains. We don't know. We know they were executed. So my motorcycle ride that I started in 1989 was in their honor, and it still is. But we have a saying on Run for the Wall. You're not forgotten if you say their names. Their names are Hall, Marshall, and Hargrove. So help me say their -- so help me say their names. Hall.

AUDIENCE: Hall.

COMRADE GREGORY: Marshall --

AUDIENCE: Marshall.

COMRADE GREGORY: Hargrove.

AUDIENCE: Hargrove.

COMRADE GREGORY: Hall.

AUDIENCE: Hall.

COMRADE GREGORY: Marshall. Hargrove.

AUDIENCE: Marshall. Hargrove.

COMRADE GREGORY: Say their names, they're not forgotten.

So Run to the Wall will continue to ride. Earlier, you heard the story of Captain Ron Forrester, his daughter -- please sit down. You old Vietnam vets can't stand up more than about five minutes. I understand that.

Ron Forrester's daughter and granddaughter rode with me in May. Lilian was on the back of a friend of mine's motorcycle. We call him Polar Bear. He's a huge guy from Alaska. All Lilian saw for 3,000 miles was a vest.

But damned everywhere we went, she got off of that bike and told people about her grandfather. And seeing his photo up here with his 2-year-old daughter, that's what this -- this country is about, is to remember those. And the only way to remember them is to say their names. Ron Forrester will have a service in October in Arlington.

I intend to be there.

And Arlington just loves it when about 2,000 or 3,000 Harley riders pull up for a service.

I thank you very much. It's an honor and a privilege to be here and a real shock.

I only heard wild stories about our Commander-in-Chief over here. Now I know they're true.

I know that he likes to whoop it up a little, but as a Marine, one more time, hoo-rah.

AUDIENCE: Hoo-rah.

COMRADE GREGORY: Hoo-rah. Thank you very much.

REMARKS: NATIONAL MEMBER OF THE YEAR AWARD
TO SARAH LIVELY, VFW POST 9675-NE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: You only do this one time, right, when you're the commander? When the first award winner come up and you know, they started talking, reading her award, and I'm like, yeah, I guess this is

it. Just get them off -- off stage.

I didn't give her an opportunity to speak and address the crowd, a Member of the Year.

So I feel like a total ass.

So I asked her to come back up here and at least say a few words to the delegation. I think she's earned that right, being a VFW Member of the Year. Sarah, please. Accept my apologies.

COMRADE LIVELY: All right. Well, let me start by saying, first, thank you to all of my comrades from across the globe. I've had the privilege to run into some of you face-to-face for the first time.

So it's an honor to be here and represent the VFW and all the great work that each and every one of you members are out there doing. It just so happened I was the one to represent all of us.

And again, it's an honor.

Thank you to all my comrades in Nebraska. I see you. So much love for your support and your confidence in electing me Post Commander. It's an honor and privilege. Not only did I serve my time in the Air Force for 20 honorable years.

Yes. But it's also an honor and privilege to continue to serve my veterans today. My brothers and sisters, wherever you are, however you serve, I'm here for you.

Again, it's an honor and a privilege. And I'm blessed today to have one of my seven children, Christopher, who is Junior ROTC and the future of our force. And so I'm very proud.

We have one daughter currently serving in the United States Navy Surface Warfare and will hope to continue the service through our generations to come.

So thank you very much.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: You know, I just looked out in the audience. I'm not sure how many World War II and Korea vets are here, but I know we got one. Ray Kavikar (phonetic) from -- oh, I know.

I saw him. I know Ray. I call him the Known Ray Kavikar. Ray Kavikar, right there next to the Maryland sign. I know. World War II and Korean Veteran. How -- 96, Ray? 97?

Good to see you, Ray. If anybody else is a World War II or Korean vet, please, I -- I -- do we have any Korean War veterans?

I forgot your name.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Jim Gray.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Jim Gray. Georgia. From the Department of Georgia. Jim Gray, a Korean War Veteran. Any other World War II or Korea -- Korea War Veteran? Oh, yeah. Can I get -- I can see somebody, especially from my own Department.

Stand up. I served in Korea, yeah, in 1999. Who? You're from New Jersey, I don't even know -- what's your name, pal? George? George, Korean service? Thank you for your service, my friend.

Okay. Thank -- thank you for being here.

PRESENTATION/REMARKS (VIDEO): VFW DISTINGUISHED CITIZENSHIP AWARD TO JARED ALLEN, FOUNDER-JARED ALLEN'S HOMES FOR WOUNDED WARRIORS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Our next awardee made himself known on the gridiron as a formidable defensive end, striking fear in the quarterbacks around the NFL during a successful 12-year career.

His incredible talent, magnetic personality, and world record for the most sacks in a single season caught the attention of millions. But for all the impact Jared Allen made on the field, he's arguably made even a bigger impact than his time in the NFL through his commitment to our military and veteran communities.

Not only did Jared spend his time after retiring from football touring military bases in the Middle East, he was so moved by the dedication and sacrifices made by our brothers and sisters-in-arms, he went even further, starting his own non-profit to help veterans, Jared Allen's Homes for Wounded Warriors.

His mission provides mortgage-free, accessible homes for veterans who were injured during their service in Iraq and Afghanistan. Coming from a military family fostered a deep desire in him to help veterans in need. Since 2009, he's done just that, building nearly 30 homes for veterans, funding one of them entirely from his own pocket.

I'm honored to present Jared Allen with the VFW Citizenship Award for his many contributions to the military and veteran community.

I will now read the citation.

Distinguished Citizen Award and Citation awarded to Jared Allen, Jared Allen's Homes for Wounded Warriors, in sincere appreciation and esteemed recognition for his unwavering dedication and support to injured veterans through his non-profit, Jared Allen's Homes for Wounded Warriors.

His tireless efforts and profound commitment to improving the lives of those who have sacrificed for our nation embody the values of service, compassion, and gratitude. From his visits to military bases to thank our troops deployed overseas to his organization -- organization's mission to build mortgage-free, ADA-compliant homes for veterans wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan, his selfless contributions resonate deeply within the veteran community inspiring hope and fostering a spirit of resilience.

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 30th day of July 2024, approved by the National Council Administration, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief, Dan West, Adjutant General.

Although he couldn't be here in person, please direct your attention to the screens for Mr. Jared Allen.
(VIDEO RECORDING PLAYED)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: You know, when everybody was giving them shout-outs to the weird sayings you said, I never asked what the Air Force says.

AUDIENCE: Per diem.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: What is it, Brian? Oh, per diem.

Well, I guess that's better than "liberty call," I can tell you that.

Can I just hear the weird Army one again?

AUDIENCE: (Sound effect.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Weirdos.

PRESENTATION/REMARKS: DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD
TO PAST ADJUTANT GENERAL KEVIN JONES

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Our guest -- our next guest is no stranger to any of you. He's sitting behind me. Now when I saw him yesterday, his facial hair kind of took me aback. I said, Kevin, "You go and have that grow about three or four more inches, you could play Santa Claus."

Kevin Jones first joined the VFW Headquarters staff in 1996 as an accounting mini-manager. He remained a dedicated member of the Headquarters staff for nearly three decades, holding positions in marketing, VFW programs, development, and the foundation, prior to joining the Adjutant General's Office, first as assistant adjutant general, then as the adjutant general, a position he held for four years, from 2018 to his retirement in 2022.

This was a pivotal time. It was -- it was then when our organization and those at that home were suddenly presented with unprecedented challenges as a virus known as COVID-19 swept the globe.

Kevin rose to every challenge, leading those under his command to seek innovative ways to confront the many unforeseen obstacles suddenly before them head-on and with agility, enacting many organizational firsts and changing the way we did business to ensure our mission was met.

In fact, we were the only veteran service organization whose programs and services continued uninterrupted, and many of the changes he instituted allow us to operate more efficiently today.

A more anticipated challenge he faced as adjutant general was that of being able to find the successful balance of doing what's right for business while maintaining member loyalty and employee satisfaction.

But Kevin was able to accomplish this by making deliberate decisions, each backed by one determinant: that it was the right thing to do.

He operated with a keen understanding of the both -- the business and fraternal aspects of the organization, the parallels and distinctions, and the great impact of each.

His many contributions to the VFW and those we exist to serve will not soon be forgotten.

I am pleased to present him with the Distinguished Service Award.

ADJUTANT GENERAL DAN WEST: Distinguished Service Award and Citation awarded to Kevin C. Jones, in spirited appreciation and recognition of his more than 27 years of dedicated service to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

His benevolence, and conscientious approach to decision making, combined with his passion for supporting veterans, service members, and their families served him well in his varied positions within the organization and led him to become a highly admired and respected leader in the role of adjutant general.

His acumen in the face of adversity and his resolute commitment to the VFW and all those who work to carry out its mission will remain his legacy for generations to come.

In witness whereof, we have, hereunto, set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States this 30th day of July 2024, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant General.

COMRADE JONES: Probably need the Buddy Poppy stepstool up here, child stepstool. But my knees knock every time I come up here, every single time for the last 20-plus years, because I am in front of our nation's heroes.

And I never took it lightly and I won't today either.

I've got a list I want to thank.

Commander-in-Chief, thank you for the invitation to allow me to attend this year. I appreciate it

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Well worth it.

Well worth it.

COMRADE JONES: -- and thank you. Comrade Commander-in-Chief, national officers, national council, comrades brothers and sisters, I'm humbled by the award.

This award is going to be shared by many in my heart, because I know one person cannot do the things that were described. I don't walk on water and I never have. I've got warts just like all of us and make mistakes.

But the fact of the matter, I feel like I surrounded my people -- surrounded myself with people that I could trust and that -- that I knew that would lead and fight this mission going forward.

Sorry, I'm working off my notes here. I had a ton of mentors. Probably, I had the opportunity on January 22nd of '22, when I announced my retirement, to begin thanking those. The list is many, from high school friends, past chiefs, to senators, to people that I trusted.

And I want to thank each and every one of them again for their mentorship and their wisdom.

To those that left us too soon who had an invaluable impact on my career, Gunner Kent, Joe Ridgely, Jack Carney, Big John Biedrzycki, John Gwizdak, Jerry Newberry, I think about you often.

And I always draw back to those conversations we had and draw from that wisdom to keep us going from day to day.

To the VFW auxiliary, thank you for your selfless support day in and day out of the veterans of foreign wars and veterans and their families.

To a key constituent group, the department adjutant quartermasters, all of you were an invaluable resource for me, but more importantly, a major part of the maturation process and education process for me as I began my journey through the veterans of foreign wars at the national headquarters.

There is no doubt you're the heartbeat of every Department and a huge contributor to the success, not only with your Departments, but to the veterans of foreign wars. I will always hold you in the highest regard.

To past Commander-in-chiefs B.J. Lawrence, Doc Schmitz, Hal Roesch, and Fritz Mihelcic, I saw firsthand your steadfast commitment. And your leadership was exemplified and documented by the many contributions you made during those times as commander-in-chief to this great organization.

Though Doc, Hal, and Fritz did not get to have the full commander-in-chief experience, what most people didn't see were the countless hours of meetings and discussions forced upon us by COVID-19.

That wasn't done by Kevin Jones.

This was done by a team of dedicated and loyal patriots to this organization.

To the chiefs, your experience and leadership helped this organization to continue to move forward while most of the country was standing still. Those years on your teams are certainly one of the highest of my career. And I can't thank you enough for your faith and your confidence in appointing me to that position.

To the staff, your dedication to the mission of the organization and helping the lives of all veterans and their families made it easy to come to work every day, knowing that each and every day you are making a difference in the lives of veterans and their families, and more importantly, helping move the VFW forward.

Your selfless and tireless commitment to the organization never went unnoticed by me. My time with you will always be the highlight of my career.

To my wife and family, thank you for your love and your unwavering support for allowing me the opportunity to help lead the greatest veteran service organization in the world. I love you.

Lastly, and undoubtedly the most important, I want to thank you.

You're the -- where the rubber meets the road. Your selfless dedication and devotion to helping veterans and their families for making an invaluable difference in your communities will, again, never go unnoticed by me.

You are the heartbeat of the organization and I never lost track of what you do at the Post, District, and Department levels, day in and day out.

I put my heart and soul into whatever position I had. It was my goal, and I hoped I achieved it, to serve this organization with Honor and integrity.

In closing, I share this award with you and those that I've mentioned previously, for your mentorship, your friendship, and your unwavering commitment and support to the greatest veteran service organization in the world. God bless you and thank you.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: NATIONAL HOME REPRESENTATIVES

KEITH JACKSON, BOARD PRESIDENT

MIKE WILSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

LAYLA 2024 BUDDY POPPY CHILD

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Since 1925, the VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids, Michigan has remained a prominent representation -- representation of the absolute best that the Veterans of Foreign Wars and its auxiliary has to offer through our work together.

Joining us this morning are three exceptionable -- exceptional individuals, National Home Board President Keith Jackson, Executive Director Mike Wilson, and most importantly, our 2024 Buddy Poppy child, Layla, who resides in the Illinois 2 house with her mom, dad, four brothers, and her German Shepherd, Potato.

You may just recognize this young lady as she was also last year's Buddy Poppy child. Layla's favorite subject in school was math. She'll be going into 8th grade this fall. Her hobbies are playing video games, creating artwork, and playing outside with Potato.

However, the hobby she loves the most is playing the keyboard and mastering new things with her piano instructor, Ms. Rhonda.

Layla loves living at the National Home because they have a home that is safe and beautiful and offers her family so many fun things to do.

She loves playing basketball at the community center gym and volunteering.

This past year, Layla and her family had a chance to go to Cedar Point and Michigan Avenue [sic]. She's raised two pigs, Hammy and Pork Chops.

You sure that's a good name for two pigs, Hammy and Pork Chops?

Is that, like, their future?

And has been selected to help raise the campus pig, Yum Yum.

What the hell goes on out here at the National Home, Mike?

Poor pigs ain't got a prayer with them names.

Layla loves being a Buddy Poppy child and says they would not have this opportunity if not for her mom's military service in the United States Navy -- liberty call. She deployed four times, and Layla says she is proud of her mom and all those who have given their lives who have served and who continue to fight to keep America safe.

As you can see, Layla is quite an extraordinary young woman. Let's give our friends at National Home a big, warm welcome.

COMRADE JACKSON: Hey, good morning.

Hey, I'd like to do a shout-out to both Department of Massachusetts and the Eastern States.

So first of all, on behalf of the board trustees, I want to take this opportunity to thank both the -- the VFW and the auxiliary, and also the Cooties and their auxiliary for all the support that they have given us this past year. Everything is alive and going well at the National Home, and we appreciate the continued support.

So at this time, I'd like to bring up Mike Wilson, the National Home executive director.

COMRADE WILSON: Commander-in-Chief Sarmiento, Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Lipphardt, Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Whitmore, comrades, friends, friends of the National Home, good morning.

125 years ago, the VFW came to life to fulfill the need to support veterans through services, advocacy, and support, a mission that has not changed for 125 years. A mission I, for one, am very proud to be a part of.

After World War I, it became pretty clear that something had to be done for the nearly 3 million Americans who went overseas to fight against our enemies. The scene played out the same all around America, but our story starts with the veterans and surviving family members and orphans around the Detroit area; the jobless, homeless, and widows and orphans who were left behind with no benefits after the war.

Amy Ross, a 22-year-old woman, while working for -- with Ford and GM and Chrysler to find work and housing for veterans, their -- and their families, also worked with the VFW Department of Michigan.

Are they not here today?

Worked with the Department of Michigan and the Department Commander Clarence Chandler, who was very aware of the situation. At the same time, the Military Order of the Cootie was also looking for ways to support veterans and their families and were looking for a central location where those needs could be fulfilled.

In 1924, a World War I veteran and cattle farmer named Corey Spencer offered to the Department of Michigan a farm of 472 acres in Eaton Rapids where the dream and the plan could come together.

Commander Chandler took it to the national organization.

The plan started coming together in 1924, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars began the process of acquiring the farm that would become the National Home. And on January 7th, 1925, the VFW set the wheels in motion by signing the Articles of Incorporation that launched the VFW National Home.

This coming January, we're going to celebrate our 100th birthday.

Thank you.

I'd like to share a video with you now that tells us a little about where we were and how we got here.

(VIDEO RECORDING PLAYED)

COMRADE WILSON: So fast-forward to today, we're planning our celebration with many events, including a black-tie event in February, a ribbon cutting for the first new house on campus in March, and a community celebration in June.

I hope everybody here can come to one of those events.

But in the meantime, we're preparing for the next century of service. We're getting to bring more and more resources to the National Home daily. We have weekly visits from Veteran Service offices. Veterans Income Tax Assistance Program, we're finding more and more ways to support veterans and families.

We have representatives from agencies and organizations around the state and United States, bringing programming toward the success of our veterans and families, including Heroes to Hives, Guitars 4 Vets, and Job Ready Veteran.

Recently, the Michigan Department of Agricultural and Rural Development was awarded a \$350,000 grant to begin a regenerative agricultural program that will give five of our veterans and families a chance to explore in the many facets of agriculture and farming that may lead them to a career in that field, pun intended.

These are free programs that come with a generous stipend for those who choose to be a part of it. We're not going to have any problem filling these seats. We're working daily to bolster our infrastructure and prepare ourselves for the next hundred years.

We've recently repaved the streets and parking lots as well as upgraded our power distribution system. In 1925, the Michigan legislator awarded a grant for \$250,000 to the National Home to help build the first ten homes and other administrative buildings.

A couple of weeks ago, the governor signed the budget this year, and a legislative grant was awarded to the VFW National Home for \$1.5 million to help upgrade the infrastructure and grounds. And we're grateful for their generosity and support.

We're doing the work for -- of those who saw the need and worked relentlessly to see the National Home become a reality. We continue because of you. Commanders, leaders, VFW members from around the nation, Departments, and Posts who have generously given of your time and your hard-earned money to keep us moving forward, we at the National Home are grateful.

Thank you.

As Chief said in 1931, the VFW has -- since 1931, the VFW has selected a child from the National Home to be the Buddy Poppy Child. The selection is done through a competition among eligible children at the National Home.

This year's selection, as we said, is -- she may look familiar, as she was selected last year as well. So please join me and welcome to the podium for a second year, '24-'25 Buddy Poppy Child, Layla.

MS. LAYLA: Hello everyone. My name is Layla, and I'm 13 years old.

I live in the Illinois house at the VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids, Michigan. My mom's name is Luisa, my dad's name is Elmer, and I have four brothers. Their names are Izaiah, who is 17; Noah, who is 9; Jaxon, who is 7; and Potato, our German Shepherd, who will be 2 in October.

I will be going into 8th grade in the fall. My favorite subject is math. Last year, I wanted to be an entrepreneur, but now I have no idea what I want to be.

But luckily, I have time to figure it out.

My hobbies are playing video games, creating different artworks, playing on the keyboard, and playing outside with Potato. However, the hobby that I love the most is playing the keyboard and mastering new songs 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. I love playing basketball at the community center gym and volunteering my time at the Home.

This past year, we've had the chance to go to Cedar Point and Michigan Adventure. We've also enjoyed the State Days, saw Santa on a firetruck, and I raised my pig this year, Ham and Pork, for 4-H at the Eaton County Fair.

If you remember, I raised my pigs last year, Hammy and Porky. So I stayed with the theme this year. I was also selected to help raise Yum Yum, who was the campus pig that we will enjoy at the end of the summer party this year.

Lastly, I have the honor and privilege of being the Buddy Poppy Child for the VFW National Home last year. And I'm thankful to have the chance to do it again this year.

We want to 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. She – she deployed four times and loved serving her country.

I am proud of my mom and of all the men and women who had given their lives, who have served, and who continue to fight to keep America safe. Thank you.

MR. WILSON: Commander Sarmiento, you and I have had some excellent conversations over this year, and you have challenged me to look at some things through a different lens. You have offered me insight into my role and given me plenty to think about in the journey forward, and I thank you for that, truly.

I would also like to thank you for challenging leaders to step up to the combined project that you and President Martinez chose to raise funds for, the transformation of a portion of the admin building to the new Welcome Center at the National Home.

This administrative space will be transformed into a space where all can feel welcome when entering, a space that offers a sophisticated atmosphere that is warm and safe. Everyone who visits the National Home will experience this space in the coming months, as construction should begin very soon.

The space paved the way for the incoming retail center in the near future. I would like to offer you this certificate for the engraved brick that will be placed in your honor at the National Home.

I'll remember our year with you on our Board of Trustees as a year of growth and learning and also a year to meet the challenge. I hope I have met your expectations and that we at the National Home made you proud of what we do.

We'll always put the veterans and families first as we continue to serve.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Comrades, before we move forward with the program, there's something -- a statement I'm going to put out. Yesterday, this body, the whole organization in attendance here passed Resolution number 414 unanimously.

There was not one single no.

I'll just give you a history.

We reaffirmed our commitment to support the State of Israel with the passage of that resolution. I want to bring to your attention why this is important. You have seen many anti-war protestors commit despicable acts last week in Washington, DC, during their protest.

These Hamassympathizers spray-painted terrorist propaganda on U.S. monuments, took down and burned the American flag while replacing it with the flag of another country being held hostage by terrorists. These protests are still going on today, albeit a little smaller.

Like many of you, I was absolutely disgusted by the vile and obnoxious protests. We fiercely condemned the desecration of our flag and monuments, just steps from the U.S. Capitol.

Such actions undermine the values of respect and unity that are fundamental to our democracy, the very fabric of who we are as an American people. The destructions of symbols that represent the collective identity of our nation only serves to deepen divisions and sow discord.

I think I can speak for every one of us. And make no mistake about this, we fully support Americans' First Amendment right of freedom of speech. We've all been there. We swore the oath to defend the Constitution, and that's number one on the Bill of Rights.

We support that, but it's crucial for Americans to express their grievances through peaceful and constructive means rather than through acts of vandalism and disrespect.

I want to thank VFW Life member and U.S. Congressman Derrick Van Orden, from the great State of Wisconsin, and his fellow veterans in Congress who restored the stars and stripes to its rightful place in three locations just outside Union Station near the Capitol after it was torn down and burned in protest.

Now look, we fought for that right. I know a lot of us has mixed feelings on burning the flag.

It's kind of freedom of speech, but when they're wearing terrorist gear, burning it and replacing it with people that we label as terrorists, that's some bullshit, man. It is time for all Americans to reaffirm our commitment to our country.

As VFW members, it is our duty to promote Americanism, to foster patriotism. These principles, respect for our democratic institutions and unity in face of adversity, are the foundations of our nation's strength and resilience. By

embracing these values, we honor sacrifices of those who came before us.

Make no mistake, understand what I said earlier, please, because I know it's -- "Oh, VFW don't want to honor our first amendment rights. "We do. I do. I bet you all of you do.

We hold that vital.

Our founding fathers made sure that was a Bill of Rights. But what we see in protest around the country, not only in DC, I don't think it was like what they envisioned. Can you imagine on monuments in Washington, DC, putting death to America? I mean, I got to be quite honest, I -- I can't fathom this.

I don't know if these people are retarded or what, but can you ima -- it -- it -- it -- I know it makes your blood boil as much as mine. And I don't mean to say that word. If it was offensive, it doesn't -- I -- I don't know. I -- but I -- that's -- oh, it's unbelievable. Death to America.

How the hell can you say that? You're standing in America. The absolute right that you have, you think to do this is because you're in America, but you're going to sit there and say "Death to America."

I don't get it.

The VFW will always stand with our country, and we will defend her against any enemy, foreign or domestic. I can't even give a Rick Flair woo because I ain't bullshitting around.

This was serious.

PRESENTATION/REMARKS:
EUGENE V. STRUZIK III, VFW TEACHER OF THE YEAR
ELEMENTARY (GRADES K-5)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Well, now our next thing on our program -- I think it's the teachers. They're probably saying, "Look, it's Jersey education." Public school education of New -- in New Jersey. It's gotten better. No, it hasn't. You see, I can't read the big words.

Teachers are the very foundation of a free and democratic society.

And when teachers are committed to teaching patriotism and Americanisms to their students, students grew up to be civically responsible leaders. In our effort to celebrate the work these patriotic and dutiful -- and dutiful teachers do every day in their classroom, it brings me great pleasure to introduce the 2023-2024 National Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year, representing grades K through 5, Eugene V. Struzik, of the - III, of Dodge City, Kansas.

Eugene -- oh -- oh. Eugene, an Air Force veteran with 26 -- per diem. Eugene, an Air Force veteran with 26 years of service hit the ground running as a new teacher in 2019.

His military experience helped him connect with students and allows him the opportunity to enrich their lives while reminding them of their civic responsibility and the true cost of freedom.

As a 5th grade teacher at Northwest Elementary School in Dodge City, Kansas, he was named the elementary school winner for his efforts to instill patriotism among his students and community.

He has coordinated Veterans Day commemorations and established the program Project Mail Call honoring our veterans, which allowed his students the opportunity to write cards to veterans embarking on a Kansas Honor Flight.

Please join me and welcome Eugene V. Struzik III, sponsored by Howard Gotschall VFW Post 1714 in Dodge City, Kansas.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: The Veterans of Foreign Wars takes pride in recognizing Eugene V. Struzik, from Northwest Elementary School in Dodge City, Kansas, as the 2024 Teacher of the Year, Grades K through 5.

MR. STRUZIK: I want to say thank you to our Commander-in-Chief Sarmiento. Thank you so much. And good morning, Comrades, auxiliary members, and our special guests.

I stand before you immensely grateful and very honored in recognition of this great award that I just received. I want to thank the VFW for all their help in getting me to this point, to all the support.

And when we talk about support, I want to first and foremost talk about my family. If it wasn't for my wife and her support that she gives me, I would not be able to do the things I do. She is the biggest supporter that I have.

I also want to thank my daughter, who is here today, as she continuously reminds me of the curiosity that children have and just how important it is for us to be able to nurture that education as we move forward.

Teaching, as you know, is not just a profession. It becomes a way of life and is a part of who we are.

My military career, I've always leaned back into it to be able to figure out what is best, and how can I put that - to make -- our message, our story of service, sacrifice, and citizenship, important to them, and it's by incorporating all these things that they were talking about, Project Mail Call, Veterans Day celebrations, cards for veterans during Valentine's Day.

It gave my students and all the students in Northwest Elementary School that ability to do that hands-on, to see the sacrifices that were made by our veterans and to understand that story. Because if we don't tell our story, our students will never understand just how precious our freedom is and how special our country is, and it's only through us sharing that.

And so I want to thank you. I had a whole speech, but I was told two minutes.

So I want to thank you for this profound honor and the service that it means to me, and it means that I'm going to continue to carry on that torch and to keep on doing that journey.

And I know, with the support of my wife and my fellow colleagues at the school, USD 443 and all their support, through the help of my own post, 1714, and all of my comrades from Kansas, I will continue this mission and continue to bring our story to the forefront, and to honor our veterans, and to teach our students what it means to be a citizen and their responsibilities and how precious our freedom is.

May God bless us, and God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.

PRESENTATION/REMARKS:
MONICA GALLOWAY, VFW TEACHER OF THE YEAR
MIDDLE SCHOOL (GRADES 6-8)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Next, I'm very pleased to introduce the 2024 National Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year, representing grades 6 through 8.

Monica Galloway of Laurel, Maryland. Monica is an Army veteran.

AUDIENCE: (Sound effect.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: That's cute, really.

An Army veteran and 6th grade math teacher at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Middle School in Laurel, Maryland, is known for her dedication to increasing participation in her county's Junior Reserve ROTC Training Corps, JROTC, and her implementation of the initiative, Immigrant Experiences, an instructional program to help promote diversity and build stronger, culturally responsive and supportive classrooms.

Galloway served in the U.S. Army for more than a decade before embarking on her 19-year teaching career.

Her time as an Army officer has helped her understand firsthand how important connected the military veterans' community with today's youth is.

The experience has led directly to an 80 to 100 percent increase in JROTC participation in her county, helping to ensure a stronger pool of candidates who go on to proudly defend our nation.

She works tirelessly to increase and improve training programs for fellow teachers, ensuring that every student in her district receives the best education experience possible.

Please join me in welcoming -- welcoming Monica Galloway sponsored by J. Paul Duke Junior Memorial Post 9376 in Clinton, Maryland.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States takes pleasure in recognizing Monica Galloway from Dwight D. Eisenhower Middle School in Laurel, Maryland, as the 2024 Teacher of the Year for grades 6 through 8.

MS. GALLOWAY: Whoa. Hello. VFW. Whoa. I got to take a minute because I tell you this is an awesome honor and a privilege to stand before you. I never saw war, but I was ready to go.

Until today -- and still today, I honor and I must salute you for this gracious honor of reaching into our classrooms across America to let those of us who go unseen and unheard, that what we do matters.

It is -- I so appreciate the love that I've received since the -- the moment I stepped off the plane and even as I step -- and I listen and I hear the great words. And being able to meet Cadet Jones, that is why I do what I do, so that we can have our students take their rightful places, so we secure the America that all of us have served and defended.

And I take grievance with the remarks of the commander of the desecration of Old Glory. I have a speech here. Yes, I do. And we're going to get to it. But you know when you give a teacher a mic, you're in trouble. And a captive audience says that, "Oh my goodness," but I won't belabor too long.

I first give Honor to God, and it is a privileged honor to be chosen as the 2023-2024 Teacher of the Year for middle school.

My journey started as a dependent.

My father served the United States Army for almost 30 years. (Sound effect.)

Put some gut in there, yes.

And he lays to rest at Arlington National Cemetery, and I stand, making sure the students that I serve, because this is a ministry.

If you're a teacher, it's a ministry. It is not a job. It's a ministry. And I believe that if we do not tell our students our future -- our past, I'm sorry -- they will not be prepared for the future.

I stand, my father is my -- is my inspiration.

And I -- and I served in the military, and I -- I'm a veteran. I did not retire, but I appreciate what it taught me. And subsequently, life happened.

And 24 years ago, God placed me in the classroom.

Little did I know that that military training was going to prepare me -- prepared me for the battlefield of the classroom. You see, when I walked into my first classroom, I left that day, and I cried and I got on my knees, I said "Lord, what have I done?"

I walked into a middle school -- middle school, and my class, I was like, "Oh my goodness. Give me back my good military job. Oh, my goodness. What have I done?"

But I'm thankful that I was able to stay there and see the -- and -- and to learn and understand the power of teaching. I had the best -- I had the best of both worlds.

When I became a teacher, I worked for the United States Air Force. Yes. Many of you-all may know about Civil Air Patrol, the National Auxiliary of the -- of the Air Force.

I served from a volunteer until also becoming the Tuskegee Airman Cadet Squadron Commander.

And as I stand here before you and I look out at your faces, and I'm scared you-all, I'm scared, forgive me, and -- and I met with the Tuskegee Airmen at Bolling Air Force Base, as I asked them to graciously take their name as the squadron name from middle school.

And after I got done crying and being honored by the presence of some of those who were still living in 2000, I am gracious.

So I stand before you thanking you for your work. I'm going to skip the next five pages, but I would be remiss to say that every once in a while, we get to see the fruits of our labor.

I celebrate knowing I played a part in the lives of the current soldiers who are now serving in the United States military, no matter what branch it is. I am grateful from hearing from my students who are serving and serve as police officers, firefighters, who have gone forth and understand service before self, the core values that the Army taught me.

We don't stand and look for problems. As a soldier, we find solutions and we act.

So I am grateful for you reaching into the classrooms and telling that teacher who feels forgotten, who feels devalued -- and thank you VFW for seeing me, for giving me a voice.

And I will use this voice to continue to make sure that our students do not forget the honor that they take so casually, that the people who have served and defended to make that happen.

Thank you, VFW, thank you for seeing me, thank you for hearing me.

God bless America and God bless you. Thank you.

PRESENTATIONS/REMARKS:

EDWARD M. GRAF, VFW TEACHER OF THE YEAR
HIGH SCHOOL (GRADES 9-12)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Last, but certainly not least, I'm pleased to welcome the 2024 National Citizen Education -- Education Teacher of the Year, representing grades 9 through 12, Edward M. Graf of Bridgewater, from the great State of New Jersey.

Edward is an Army veteran.

AUDIENCE: (Sound effect.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: You guys -- you guys are weird, man.

And a high school social studies teacher at Somerset County Vocational and Technical High School in Bridgewater, New Jersey.

Edward was selected for the continued enthusiasm and energy he brings to his classroom and for his dedication to honoring American -- America's servicemembers, veterans, and Gold Star families through multiple student-led events, and his establishment of Proud To Be An American Day, which honors the service of those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country.

A 21-year career teacher, his military service has provided valuable insight to educating students on the importance of service and of the debt we owe America's fallen service members and veterans.

His encouragement of student-led events to benefit local Gold Star families, complete with veteran guest speakers and a positive glimpse into the military experience for students considering joining the service continues to leave an incredible mark.

Please join me in welcoming Edward M. Graf, sponsored by Bernardsville Memorial VFW Post 7858 in Bernardsville, New Jersey.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is proud to present Edward M. Graf, from Somerset County Vocational and Technical High School, located in Bridgewater, New Jersey, the 2024 Teacher of the Year, grades 9 through 12.

MR. GRAF: It's a sincere honor for me to be here today. I -- I can't tell you how grateful I am for this award. I served as a light infantry soldier after I got out of college, and I wanted to serve my whole life.

I had a really tough time in the military. It was a really hardcore unit and it was hard to come out. I want to thank Jesus Christ for being here today. Without him, I wouldn't be here today.

I also want to say how thankful I am for the VFW. The VFW is for me with any school programs I've ever had to do, 110 percent. The guys from New Jersey are great. The -- the Basking Ridge/Bernardsville Post, Fred Buehler District 15.

This man, Jim Wiser (phonetic), is such a mentor to me. He's an amazing man. I'm so thankful for him and all the guys there. Thank you, Jim.

The reason why I did these -- these programs at school was, when I got out of the Army and -- and -- and I tell you, in the combat arms in the Army, it was very tough.

Okay. Very -- very tough missions and so forth. Some of my friends were still serving in Iraq. I -- I didn't serve in Iraq, but afterwards, they -- they went on to serve in Iraq.

And we had kids in the class that didn't want to salute the flag and they'd tell me things, and I'll use their vernacular, "America sucks." "I hope America loses," and I was shocked at this. Now, they're not learning these values at home. Like, my father was a Vietnam veteran and highly decorated.

Tomorrow will be the one-year anniversary of where we were lost him. He was a crew chief and flight engineer in Vietnam on a Chinook helicopter. Here's his picture in 1967. We lost him one year ago. And I know my father's looking down at me today and he's proud of me.

My mom and dad took me to the Memorial Day parades. They took me to these things. We used to be, like, four to six deep at the Memorial Day parade in Union. You had to get there early for a spot at the -- at the parade.

Fortunately, it's not like that in -- in a lot of cases today. And these kids aren't learning these things from home.

So I said, "We got to do something about this.

"So we -- we started honoring Gold Star families and -- and bringing these guest speakers at a program called Proud to be American Day. It's like a Memorial Day-type program.

The kids that say, "You know, Mr. Graf, we do have a good country. I -- I realize that these people sacrifice for our nation." And there are a lot of people that, unfortunately, in education, aren't rah-rah America. In fact, I was told "Ed, you'll never get teacher of the year."

Well, here, I am now at the VFW, National Teacher of the Year.

That's what I learned in the Army, as a light infantryman, you adapt, you overcome, you keep going, you give it your all, and you find a way to make it work. And that's what we did.

I was told "You'll never get a helicopter to come into your school."

Well, last year we had five helicopters come to our school.

I was told "You'll never get the Army Golden Knights Parachute Team to jump at your school.

They only jump at like 40,000 -- events of 40,000 attendees or more."

Well, we had the Army Golden Knights Parachute Team jump at our school.

We didn't take no for an answer, because like all of you, you fought for our nation. Well, we're fighting for our nation in our classroom. We're not going to let this go.

The truth is this is a war for the future of our nation, with these young people. They have to be taught these great things about our country.

We're not perfect.

We got to make some things different in the future. We got to learn, but these students need to be presented things that are factual about our country. We do have a great country and they need to learn that.

So we've had this Proud To Be an American Day. So we have a short clip here of, and oh, and by the way, no government or school funds are used for this. And we were told "You'll never get any government or school funds." You'll never make it happen.

Well, of this past 17 years, we raised over \$200,000, and the students and I, through donations, raised over \$30,000 last year. And here's our professional production video we'll show you now of our event.

(VIDEO RECORDING PLAYED)

MR. GRAF: Honestly, this is one of the best days of my life to be here with you today. I -- and I'm so proud. We have such targets on our back for doing these type of programs. I will tell you to ask your children or grandchildren what they're learning at school.

Keep getting into the schools, talk to the -- talk to the young people, teach them about our country. There's so much they can learn from you and we're going to keep up this fight and VFW, let's do it together. We're going to educate this next generation of young people in America and we're going to keep our country going.

Thank you so much. VFW.

PRESENTATION/REMARKS:
VFW DISTINGUISHED PATRIOTIC AWARD
TO FAWN WEAVER, CEO UNCLE NEAREST WHISKEY

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Our next guest is certainly no stranger to the military community. Fawn Weaver is the dynamic CEO and founder of the award-winning Uncle Nearest whiskey brand named in honor of Nearest Green, the world's first Black American Master Distiller.

For the past two years, Fawn has embarked on an incredible journey across America to recognize the dedicated individuals who have helped propel Uncle Nearest to its status today as the leading Black-owned spirits brand worldwide. It was during this journey when she became profoundly moved by a group of sailors during Fleet Week in New York City.

Huh.

Sailors, bourbon.

So yo, you and the Army can say the hoo-ah, whatever it is, or you in the Marines can say hoo-rah and you can have your per diem. Everybody knows what the Navy do, they recall and recall.

Determined to show her appreciation and support for our military community, she would embark on a new tour with a specific mission to visit military bases across the nation.

She aptly names this effort, Thank You for Your Service. Thank you for your service. Thank you for your support, to show her gratitude to one of the brand's most supportive communities.

Kicking things off with the MacDill Air Force Base, she would visit 35 military installations over the course of her 16-week tour, immersing herself in the day-to-day of service members, engaging with top leadership, and sharing these experiences with many of our online followers.

For her unwavering show of support to our nation's military, I am pleased to present Fawn Weaver with the VFW Distinguished Patriotic Award.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Distinguished Patriotic Award and Citation awarded to Fawn Weaver in special recognition and sincere appreciation of her honoring, supporting, and recognizing America's active-duty service members and veteran communities through her "Thank You" tour at military installations across the United States.

The dedication and selflessness she puts forth in recognizing America's Servicemen and women while encouraging all fellow Americans to do the same, embodies her patriotic spirit and inspires others.

By making meaningful connections with troops and leadership on military bases across our country, Weaver helps to ensure they know their service is never forgotten and always appreciated, thus, duly earning her the utmost appreciation and respect 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 30th day of July 2024, approved by the National Council of Administration, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant General.

MS. WEAVER: I don't accept awards, and I -- I have to tell you, SEAC, John Troxell, where is SEAC John Troxell?

Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Retired, John Troxell has accompanied me on every base, and throughout the last five years, I have turned down more awards and honors than I can count, but I could not turn down SEAC John Troxell, and I could not turn down the opportunity to be here to encourage you.

My father was an enormously patriotic man. My mother, any time the Blue Angels would -- would go up when you -- when I say tears, like, not pretty tears, ugly tears. I grew up in a household that loved, honored, respected our nation.

And I do appreciate that every politician ends with "God Bless America," but I think we need to understand who we are and know that God has already blessed America.

My father grew up in Houston, Texas, the son -- the son of a domestic worker. He picked cotton in the fields of

Houston. He went on to Southern University and at Southern University, a civil rights organization came in, and it's at the time that sit-ins were beginning, and they offered any person who participated in a sit-in, they said, if you get kicked out of the university for participating, we will give you a one-way ticket anywhere in the country.

My father participated. He was kicked out of Southern University, and he chose Los Angeles, California. He wanted to be a writer and a producer and a man by the name of Berry Gordy in Detroit, Michigan heard his music and reached into him and said, "You know, I've got this startup called Motown and I've heard your music, and I would love for you to become a part of this."

My father went from picking cotton in the fields of Houston, Texas to being one of the original hit makers for Motown. That only happens in America.

My mother gained her patriotism from her father who was a GI. Immediately following World War II, he was in Germany, where he met my German grandmother.

Now we still, to this day, have never gotten a true story of how a woman who only spoke German and an African American man who did not, how they fell in love, had a baby all the rest of that.

The only thing we knew for sure, the only thing they would admit was that they were hustlers together, that all of his rations for sugar, cigarettes, whatever it was that he wasn't going to use, she would sell it on his behalf.

So somehow too, Bonnie and Clyde fell in love, came to the U.S. and my mother was born in that household. They passed on to me this love of America, not because America is perfect.

America is so young, there are bottles of Cognac older than us. We forget that America is an experiment. It is a democracy that is an experiment. What we are able to appreciate, the freedom that I have been able to enjoy, is because I live in a democracy. No place else is my story possible.

I left home when I was 15. I love my parents. We have a great relationship now, but at 15, not so much. I left home at 15. I dropped out of high school. I lived in three homeless shelters by the time I was 18. I tried to commit suicide twice by the time I was 21.

And now I am one of only five African American women in the history of this country to build a company that is worth over \$1 billion. That only happens in America.

Let me tell you why I go to all of our bases.

And at this point, John Troxell can tell me if I'm right, but we have been to over 40 bases. We were recently in Germany together at Ramstein and at Vilseck. And I simply go to say, thank you. I don't tell them who I am or -- or what I do. I don't want anybody to think I'm there to sell whiskey. I don't care if they know I sell whiskey or not.

I am there to say thank you, because what I understand is what I believe a lot of America is missing right now, but nobody in this room is missing. Not only are we an experiment, but 70 years ago this experiment became the superpower.

How does a country so young become a superpower?

And I'm always interested when people tell me it's because of our economy. Do you-all realize that we owe over \$1 trillion to our two largest adversaries? The ones that we don't want to claim are adversaries, so we allow them to float a balloon through our airspace because we want to pretend we're friends.

We owe them \$1 trillion. You want to know why they don't collect the debt? Because we have the strongest military in the world. That is why we are the superpower. We must pass on to this generation and every future generation, if America is to remain a superpower, it will not be our technology.

It will not be our money. It will not be our advancements. It will be the strength of our military. So to everyone in here that have sacrificed your lives, who wrote and signed a dotted line that said that you would give up your life for this country, thank you.

I honor you. I am grateful to you. And God has blessed America. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS:

JARED LYON, PRESIDENT & CEO, STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA

SR. VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LIPPHARDT: Our next guest served as a submariner and diver during his -- submariner, okay.

It's not limited to Duane, okay?

A diver during his service 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 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. The VFW and SVA have worked

together for more than a decade through our VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship program, providing exemplary VFW members who are student veterans the opportunity to make their voices heard on Capitol Hill.

Now please give a warm welcome to an outstanding leader and veterans advocate, VFW Life member of Post 3308 in Tallahassee, Florida, Jared Lyon.

MR. LYON: So I would argue it is submariner, but that's even up for debate within the submarine community. It's good to have the -- the chief be a Navy veteran. So it's always good to have a Navy veteran at the helm. Just remember, as a surface warfare guy, you'll always be a target.

I can get in on it, too, right? So I'm excited to join you here representing my home Post of 3308, Tallahassee, Florida. I am a Life member of this great organization, first joining at Post 3308 on Veterans Day in 2010, when I was, myself, a student veteran, an undergraduate at Florida State University.

I'm a dumb kid from a small town in Massachusetts. And the notion that I could ever go to college was solely due to my service in the military. When I was in dive school in Panama City Beach, Florida, I had the opportunity to, as Chief says, achieve liberty.

I was mostly a liberty risk for the majority of the time I served in the Navy, but I was in a dive school class in the fall. And so I had the opportunity to go over to Florida State University. No one in my family had graduated college.

To see Florida State University as a young sailor, I fell in love. It was the place that I wanted to go. And it was because of my service in the military and the GI bill, I'd have the opportunity to go to school.

It was the VFW where I found my place as a veteran. I hadn't really claimed my veteran status. I'd been out of the Navy for over five years before I joined the VFW, and today, almost 14 years later, I have the privilege to speak to you about the powerful alliance that has profoundly impacted, not only my life, but the lives of thousands of veterans across the nation.

It's this collaboration between Student Veterans of America and the Veterans of Foreign Wars that has forged this relationship. This partnership has not only fostered a supportive environment for our veterans, but it has also driven significant legislative and educational advancements, beginning with the development of the Post-9-11 GI Bill. Since

the passage of the Post-9-11 GI Bill and the creation of SVA back in 2008, the VFW has made a special place for student veterans in its advocacy and its practice and the hearts of our Posts across this great country.

The Post-9-11 GI Bill stands as a cornerstone of achievement in the history of veterans educational benefits. In the years following the attacks of September 11th, 2001, there was a pressing need to support veterans who were transitioning from their military service into civilian life, particularly through higher education.

I was one of those transitioning service members and the VFW looked at this ragtag group of student veterans from all over the country who had come together to advocate for improved education benefits, and this new Post-9-11 generation of veterans.

Recognizing the feeling of needing support, the VFW put the weight of, at the time, their 112-year-old organization behind what would become Student Veterans of America, to advocate for a comprehensive set of educational benefits package for those veterans returning home from service in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The advocacy and collaboration paid off. In 2008 when Congress passed the Post-9-11 GI bill, this landmark legislation provided tuition and fee payments directly to universities, monthly housing allowance, and a stipend for books and supplies.

It fundamentally transformed access to education for veterans like me, the first in their family to ever go to college.

The SVA and VFW's joint efforts ensured that the bill addressed the unique needs of modern-day veterans, setting a new standard for veteran education benefits. The spirit of this advocacy that fueled the Post-9-11 GI Bill continues through the VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship, established to empower student veterans with a passion for advocating for benefits for veterans and our family members.

This fellowship offers them the opportunity to bring their voices directly to the halls of Congress and our nation's capital. SVA's very own Tammy Bartlett, a Coast Guard veteran who served in the Middle East and a life member of the VFW is an alumna of this program, and now proudly serves as the voice on Capitol Hill for a nation of student veterans as our Vice President of Government Affairs at the SVA National Headquarters in Washington, DC.

Give it up for Tammy. She's a Coast -- we got no Coasties in the room? There's always a few Coasties, right?

So in recent years, this fellowship has been refocused to prioritize those who demonstrate a genuine commitment to legislative advocacy. One shining example of this campaign to spread awareness about the Not Just a Number Act.

This crucial piece of legislation improves the tracking and reporting of veteran suicide, aiming to better provide support and resources to those who need it. Through the fellowship, student veterans have played a crucial role in advocating for this important legislation and others, demonstrating the power of informed and passionate advocacy that shapes policy in our nation's capital.

Their grassroots efforts have taken various forms, from creating informal materials that are both informational, and helping organize panels that are aimed at breaking down the stigma surrounding suicide. These initiatives highlight that suicide affects everyone, and everyone can contribute to making a positive impact in someone's life.

Another remarkable initiative born from the VFW is the relationship with Sport Clips and their Help a Hero Scholarship. Student veterans have routinely named financial challenges as a significant barrier to academic success.

Approximately 75 percent of student veterans work full or part-time while we are going to school. This number is even higher for gender and racial minorities, where over 95 percent women veterans of color are working while earning their education.

This scholarship from Sport Clips is making an impact, by providing critical assistance to those who are pursuing higher education. Funded by the generous contributions from Sport Clips haircuts, these scholarships are awarded to student veterans who demonstrate academic excellence and who are committed to their communities.

Beyond financial support, the scholarship represents a recognition of the hard work and dedication for our veterans, encouraging them to pursue their educational and professional goals with confidence. Lastly, I'd like to highlight the Student Veteran Support grant for SVA chapters.

These grants, provided by the VFW, are designed to support the growth and development of SVA chapters at the local level, on college and university campuses, and within the communities of our local VFW posts.

By funding initiatives that enhance the campus experience for student veterans, these grants enable chapters to create supportive and inclusive environments for student veterans on college campuses nationwide.

Whether it's through organizing career fairs, providing mentorship programs, or hosting networking events, the Student Veteran Support grants from the VFW empower SVA chapters to meet the unique needs of their members, fostering a sense of community and camaraderie.

The collaboration between Student Veterans of America and the Veterans of Foreign Wars is a testament to the power of partnership in driving positive change. The chapter president of SVA's current Chapter of the Year is emblematic of this power.

As a student veteran in West Virginia at Marshall University, Jamie Springston works closely with the VFW locally to provide a benefits talk, which actively bridges the gap between Guard and reservists and their earned benefits. Jamie is a veteran of the world's finest Navy, where he served as a corpsman with the Marines in a combat deployment to Afghanistan.

That's it for the Marines? Just a little Department of the Navy cheer.

I love it. Thank you. Love our Marines.

Jamie is currently serving as the Adjutant General for the Greater Huntington Post 1064 and is on numerous committees at the Post, previously serving as a trustee for Post 9738. And if all that weren't enough, he does all the cooking at the Post barbecue fundraisers.

He joined his local VFW because of the VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship. And since, he has been a driving factor for increasing the support that West Virginia has given to our veterans.

I encourage each of you to engage with your local SVA chapter. I guarantee that there's at least one Jamie Springston and one Tammy Bartlett in every state in this nation. With over 1,600 SVA chapters across the country and in four nations abroad, it shouldn't be hard to connect with one near you.

And if you need us, the SVA National Headquarters team is standing by to help you make that connection.

I am here because of the VFW. I found my place and mentors in the veteran community because of the VFW. I became an advocate for veterans because my post commander at the time, Mark Alvarez, told me to go to the Washington, DC office of the VFW.

And I'm here because Ryan Gallucci, Ray Kelly, and the legendary Bob Wallace took the time to show me the ropes and explain how to get an idea like in-state tuition for student veterans to become law of the land today.

It's today's student veterans and alumni of SVA that are part of this organization. And because of your efforts in our communities across the country, even more can become part of our VFW. As we look to the future, let us remember the importance of advocacy, support, and community.

Together, we can ensure that our veterans receive the recognition, resources, opportunities, and the belonging that they deserve. Thank you for all you do for veterans and our families.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Don't woo. Come on.

We got to get through this. Because you know I can't stop.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS:
DENIS MCDONOUGH, SECRETARY,
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: It gives me great pleasure to introduce the Honorable Denis McDonough.

Before coming to the VA, he served as the 26th White House Chief of Staff and as Principal Deputy National Security Advisor. He believes deeply, as he testified to Congress, that there is no more sacred obligation nor noble undertaking than to uphold our promises to our veterans, whether they came home decades ago or days ago.

Let me tell you, take the politics out of it. I don't care where you stand on what side of the aisle. Secretary McDonough is a true friend of the VFW.

You know why I say that? Oh, you know why I say that? Several months ago when I saw in the Facebook chats, you know, the groups that VFW has, where they had these big bonuses went out to the VA executives. And they're calling for his head.

He's the one that found it and stopped it. He brought it to our attention and said -- I don't know how, you know, like -- secretary, I don't know how, like, how -- the -- the magic of how you did this. He found it and said, "This is bullshit and we're going to stop it."

So thank you for that, Mr. Secretary. Please join me and welcome a true friend to veterans in the VFW, the 11th Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Honorable Denis McDonough.

MR. MCDONOUGH: Commander Sarmiento, thank you for the kind introduction.

You're going to get me in trouble here, man.

Thank you for inviting me to join this awesome annual convention.

Thanks especially for your courageous service in the Navy, for your family's courageous service following in your footsteps, for protecting Americans here at home as a police officer, a cop, in the great State of New Jersey and representing and serving your fellow vets and leading your 1.4 million VFW members.

Thank you so much for this opportunity.

Let me also recognize Ryan Gallucci and Mike Figlioli, both unrelenting advocates for VFW, for your members, which means I have to say it's not uncommon for those two to be up in my business, if you know what I mean. And sometimes I get a little sick of it. Quick PSA.

As many of you know, we have a claims clinic in Exhibition Hall and the VHA health clinic is in the upstairs concourse. I just went and saw them and already -- we've already had a couple hundred vets over there for the C&P exams, or to update the claim. So I'm not going to give you the numbers.

I just want you to know that they're here for one reason. They're here to serve you. So please see them before you leave this week. It's a great -- it's a great honor to be with you again, especially on such a historic occasion, your 125th National Convention.

Let me just begin by reinforcing something I've said before. No one does more for vets than you. Veterans have no better advocate than you. As you said last year in Phoenix, Commander, advocacy is the heart of the VFW.

And the VA has no better partner than you.

Here's what I'm thinking about: As the Civil War was ending, President Lincoln charged the nation to care for veterans, those who'd given so much, who'd shed so much blood to save our union. Eight -- eight decades later, the country again deep in war, millions of Americans being drawn on, being called upon, President Franklin Roosevelt echoed Lincoln, assuring those heroes that the American people would not let them down when the war was won.

1988, President Reagan said that America's debt to you never ends, never can be fully repaid. Speaking of giants, there's Bob Wallace right there. Good to see you, brother.

Today, President Biden calls that commitment to veterans our country's one sacred obligation, preparing those we send into harm's way and caring for them, for you, and for your families when you come home.

Now, Presidents and Americans make that commitment. VF -- VA's job is to keep that promise. And VFW holds us accountable to that promise.

From your members in the Posts in the most remote chapters, like Commander Tony Phillips' Golden Heart Post up in Fairbanks, Post 3629, to Commander Morton King's Post 1170 right here in Louisville, to Post 5579 in Gibbstown, New Jersey -- I think you know that one, Commander -- to Washington, DC, where Commander Sarmiento, Ryan, Mike, Bob represent each of you to the nation.

You hold us accountable to that sacred obligation to you and your fellow vets, with your powerful advocacy. You hold VA accountable. You hold me accountable. Accountability is making sure VA's caring for you with the kind of conviction, determination, and devotion you showed when our country needed you the most, making sure we at VA are

working for you.

Let me repeat that. We, all of us at VA, work for you. You remember, last year in Phoenix I reported out on that work. I told you we had a record-setting year. I told you we deliver more care and more benefits to more vets than in any other time in our nation's history.

This morning here in Louisville, I can tell you that it's been another record-setting year, because rather than expecting you to change your life to fit into VA, we're changing VA to come to you across the country. That means over 550 in-person claims clinics this year.

That means connecting to you in person, like today here at the convention, as well as over e-mail, text, through the media, all in the interest of fitting VA into your life. That's what the National Cemetery Administration's outreach is all about, a relationship that can help give you peace of mind, give your family peace of mind, so when that day comes, everything's taken care of.

To make that easier on you and your loved ones, NCAA has reduced from months to weeks the turnaround time for pre-need eligibility applications for memorial benefits, and they're replicating that kind of responsiveness for your other memorial benefits; burial allowances, memorial flags, headstones, markers, medallions.

That's working for you.

And taking that mindset means getting claims decisions faster. A decade ago decisions, on average, took nearly a year. Today, it's less than half that. We're faster for a number of reasons, not least because we grew our workforce. And that workforce means business.

Last year, they made nearly 2 million claims decisions for vets. This year, they're on track to make more than 2.5 million claims decisions. And they've broken the monthly claims production record three times.

More good news: You've been filing more claims than ever since President Biden signed the PACT Act two years ago. Nearly 4.5 million claims so far. But even with all of that, I worry we're coming up short. And why is that?

Over a million vets have filed PACT Act claims and the grant rate is at 75 percent, but there are over 6 million vets who qualify under the PACT Act. So there are still millions of eligible vets and survivors who haven't filed, whether for PACT or any other service connection.

We've got to keep reaching out to them. We've got to keep encouraging vets and their survivors to file, and when they file, to file with accredited veteran service officers like VFWs, not with claim sharks.

And we're not going to stop until every one of you has the benefits and services that you've earned. Because we work for you. On healthcare, we also know we work for you. Remember, your health outcomes are better when you come to VA. VA care is the best care, most affordable care for vets.

The best, most affordable care for you, what one report called the significant VA advantage.

One quick example. Our new VA tele-emergency care. We were just -- Carol and I were just talking about this backstage. If you're enrolled in VA healthcare and you're concerned you need to go to an emergency room, you can call your VA Health Connect

VISN Clinical Contact Center. A VA nurse will immediately work with you to get timely access to the right care. That might be VA tele-emergency care. It might be a virtual clinic visit that day. It might be an appointment with your primary care provider.

And if it's an emergency, the VA nurse will kind -- call 911 -- 911 for you and stay on the line with you until your help arrives. It's a new program. Only about 45,000 vets have used it so far. Nearly 60 percent of them, who've called for help had their issue resolved on the phone with a tele-emergency care encounter.

Clinical Contact Centers are open 24/7. Tele-emergency care will be live in every VISN this October. That makes it easier for you to get the care you need without having to get in your car to drive God knows how far. So faster access to high quality emergency care built to fit into Veterans' lives.

It's a commonsense idea.

So sensible that you know it didn't come from Washington. You won't be surprised to know the idea was hatched by one of your fellow vets, a Marine -- that's what I'm talking about -- who knows that we work for you. Tele-emergency care is all about getting vets timely access to VA world-class care.

And I'm glad to report that more and more vets are enrolling in their VA care, over 9.1 million. In just the two years since PACT was signed into law, 710,000 veterans have enrolled. That's a 34 percent increase over the prior two years. 40,000 of those vets enrolled under the new PACT Act eligibility, eligibility we expanded years earlier than the law required.

And more vets are using that healthcare when they have it. That's -- will get 127 million appointments at VA this year, far surpassing last year's record.

Breaking records good, but it ain't good enough. It's just not good enough. There are still millions of eligible vets who aren't enrolled. So please spread the word. We won't rest until every vet gets the care that you have

deserved -- that you have earned and you so richly deserve.

Recognizing we work for you means more benefits, more care to more vets than ever, and also means that how we provide that care and those benefits matters, too. Right now, vets tell us they trust us more than ever. Our most recent veteran satisfaction rating, we earned the highest trust scores since we started tracking this in 2016.

You trust us more because our teammates recognize who we work for. We work for you. Let's hear from a few of them, VA public servants who are also your fellow vets. They want to tell you what working for you means to them. Bobby Hall, why don't you lead off.

MR. HALL: McDonough. Good morning, everybody. My name's Bobby Hall.

I'm a retired Air Force veteran, and I'm a rater with the VA Regional Office here in Louisville. I love working for the VA, and serving you, my fellow veterans, is my life's work.

During my ten years with the Veterans Benefit Administration, I've probably talked to 1,000 veterans, both on the phone and in person. And at each conversation, I wrap it up with, "As veterans, we have to stick together." So what does sticking together mean to me, as a VA employee, and as a veteran that is here to serve you?

Well, it means making every claim like it's my claim and treating it like that. It means going above and beyond to make sure all the evidence is there so that the decision is correct. For example, one late Friday afternoon, I got a claim for a hospice veteran at the VAMC here in Louisville.

I was reviewing the file and I saw that the veteran didn't have much time left, and evidence was still needed.

So I made an admission. I went to the hospital that night and then sat with the veteran and his family at his bedside. I explained to the family the evidence that I needed to prove the claim. The family said they had that evidence at home. They told me they'd bring it the next morning.

So that Saturday morning I got up, went back to the hospital, collected the records, and took them over to my regional office. And within an hour of me showing up, that veteran was 100 percent service-connected before he passed away. Navy Veteran, served on the USS Okanogan.

My research told me that that was a brown-water Navy ship. And because this veteran had terminal cancer, he should be granted benefits.

Well, there were others in my office that weren't so sure.

So we ended up sending that claim up to Central Office in Washington, DC. Central Office made the determination that that veteran should be granted benefits. So within an hour, that veteran was 100 percent service connected.

Another case I had was for a veteran that had cancer, cancer that had spread. He was in bad shape. He had so much cancer I couldn't turn him -- I couldn't determine the source of that cancer. So I made an admission to contact this veteran so I could speak to his oncologist.

During the conversation, the oncologist showed me where the cancer started. And within an hour of that conversation, that veteran was 100 percent service-connected, along with being granted permanent total status and special month with compensation for housebound.

This is the kind of work we do every day for the veterans we serve. This is the kind of work that you, as my fellow veterans, deserve. Not every claim has been easy and not every claim has been clear, and I've shed some tears along the way for the veterans that I couldn't get to in time.

But I get right back up and I move to the next veteran up, because that's what you deserve. As I said in the beginning, I love what I do and this is my life's work. And as veterans, we have to stick together. Thank you. I would like to hand the mic over to my friend, Jason.

MR. BROKER: Bobby, good morning. I'm Jason Broker and I've been with the VA National Cemetery Administration, the NCA, for almost 20 years now.

At NCA we're deeply committed to honoring veterans with their final resting place in our beautiful national shrines across the country, and with lasting tributes that commemorate your service to our nation.

Our mission, our focus, and our commitment are to serve you and all veterans and their families with the utmost dignity, respect, and compassion. And we want our national cemeteries to be the place that inspires visitors to understand and appreciate your service and your sacrifices.

It is my honor to be the assistant director for the Kentucky's National Cemetery complex. The complex consists of seven national cemeteries in Kentucky, one soldier's lot, and one national cemetery in New Albany -- New Albany, Indiana, where I began my career.

It's always been my privilege to serve and support all of you, my fellow veterans, and your loved ones. This job is very fulfilling to me. It is an amazing job. The staff at our national cemeteries are mostly veterans like me and you. I've worked at several national cemeteries and with many different NCA colleagues.

The care and devotion my coworkers show every day motivates me. The teamwork and dedication I see every

day from all our employees makes me want to always go above and beyond in serving you and your families.

It really does inspire me. I have seen a lot over the years working for the NCA, but there are always those one or two stories that leave me grateful and thankful for the life that I have been blessed with today. I will never forget about a burial when I was foreman at the Camp Nelson National Cemetery, about -- about 100 miles east of here in Nicholasville, Kentucky.

We buried a child of a veteran that day, and I still can't imagine how much grief and sadness that veteran and his wife must have felt that afternoon. The burial was dignified and carried -- caring, just like all our burials in national cemeteries.

And as sad and difficult as it had to be for those parents that day, they still stopped to tell me this: Thank you and your staff for everything that you do. I will never forget those powerful words. They reminded all of us of just how important our job is helping veterans and their families in some of the most difficult moments in their lives.

Let me close with this. When I left the military, I had no idea about burial benefits the VA provides. I want to encourage all of you to look into your burial benefits through VA, and I want to encourage all of you to visit one of the many national cemeteries across the country, if you have not already. They are some of the most beautiful places in America.

Thank you for letting me share some of my experience working and caring for you and your families at VA. We'll nail -- now hand it over to Darrell.

MR. KYLE: Good morning. Thanks, Jason. My name is Darrell Kyle. I'm an Air Force retired veteran, 26 years all active duty. I was a aircraft repair journeyman on fighter and cargo aircraft, probably about 20 different systems, and it is a love of my life to serve.

I've worked at the VA Memphis now for 14 years with some hard-charging colleagues who take a lot of pride in helping vets. I happen to be a voc rehab specialist. It's been a labor of love, as I mentioned. As a voc rehab specialist, we go to veterans.

We meet veterans where they are, literally, okay? That can mean canvassing the Memphis Metro for veterans living under bridges, in cars, and in homeless shelters. When we connect with these vets, we find out what their needs are and offer supportive services to meet those needs.

Finding a job is essential to what I help vets find -- do. Let me tell you about just one. We'll call him Mr. Smith. He was unemployed and homeless, and he also changed my life. In our first appointment, Mr. Smith told me right off the bat -- big -- big personality,

"Mr. Kyle, I need to get a job that will help me take care of my three girls."

He called his little girls his angels. I told him it's all going to work out. So I helped him write a resume that highlighted his culinary talents. With that, he got a job at the hospital's canteen as a line cook. In a short period,

Mr. Smith was making a livable wage and he was a favorite amongst the employees and veteran patients because of his warm personality and his height, 6'4". Mr. Smith also wanted not just a place to stay, but a home. My social work colleagues in Homeless Services helped him find that.

When he was settled in, he called me, with that big personality. "You're not going to believe this place, Mr. Kyle." He said, "It's totally renovated. Three-bedroom, all brand new appliances. All that's missing is a white picket fence." He said, "My angels," he said, "will love it."

I reminded him how it was his work and focus that got him his job and a safe place to stay for his little girls. And with a job and a home, he got custody of those same girls. He said, "You know what? You were right, Mr. Kyle. Everything is working out."

Mr. Smith was motivated and upbeat, and I cheered him on because he was winning in life. One time he told me that he was a poet and he showed me these odd pieces of paper, probably 50 or 60, just pieces of paper where he had grabbed them and wrote down a creative moment.

With a big smile he said, "I hope you can help me find somebody to make these poems into a book for my angels to have someday."

Well, ladies and gentlemen, that I wasn't able to help him with.

This past Memorial Day, Monday, May 27th, he passed away in a car accident. I'm telling you this story to honor him, his girls, his courage, his victories, against odds that would defeat so many others. And I just imagine in my mind that those nine -- those 11, 9 and 6-year-old daughters got to see him get it right.

As much as we want to support veterans and help them change their lives for the better, Mr. Smith actually changed my life again. He made me a better VA employee and made me a better human being. I'll always be in his debt.

So I say thank you. Thank you for allowing Bobby and Jason and I to serve you, our stakeholders, our community service partners. And with that I say, Secretary McDonough, back to you, sir.

MR. MCDONOUGH: Awesome. Bobby, Jason, Darrell. Bobby, Jason, Darrell, thank you for your service in uniform, for your continuing service to your fellow vets.

It's such a blessing to get to work with you on behalf of these amazing heroes. Working hard for you, making consistent, steady progress year after year, delivering for you, record levels.

That's our job, but it's your accomplishment, VFW.

You play a critical role, demanding excellence from VA and keeping our promise to you and your fellow vets. Keeping that promise, paying against what Commando -- Comm -- Commander Sarmiento called in Phoenix last year "the only national debt" is going to mean we need more resources this year.

I know you've heard about this, but I want it -- you to hear about it from me, too.

As a result of bringing more vets to VA, we've exceeded the most aggressive projections from the beginning of this year. And that's why, now, we told Congress we need more money to keep delivering more care -- more care, more benefits to more vets than ever before.

We project we'll need about \$3 billion this fiscal year for mandatory benefit payments to nearly 7 million vets who get monthly benefit checks. And we need it by September 20, so those October 1 checks get sent. Next year, we'll need an additional 12 billion for our medical care.

So we're working with congressional leaders, with the Office of Management and Budget, to address these needs in a way that allows us to continue to deliver more care and more vets -- more care and more benefits to more vets than ever.

That's what you deserve.

They're your benefits, it's your care. That's what matters most. And we're not going to stop pushing until every veteran, family member, caregiver, survivor, gets the care and benefits they've earned for your steadfast service to this nation.

So that's where we are in 2024, providing more care, more benefits to more vets than ever. We're proud of that. But we are not satisfied. And I know you're not satisfied either. How could we be satisfied when we still don't have a relationship with as many as half of this awesome country's awesome veterans?

How could we be satisfied when there are still millions of veterans who qualify under the President's PACT Act, but who still have not filed a claim? How can we be satisfied when we're staring down a monumental national crisis, where more than 6,000 of our vets die every year by suicide, because they've become convinced that they're a burden on this country.

This country that they've done so much to strengthen, this country that still needs them so dearly. How could we be satisfied until every veteran in crisis knows that there's hope, that there's help, and that treatment works.

So no, we ain't satisfied. We ain't satisfied. And that is the main reason I came back to see you; to hold myself and to hold all of VA accountable to you. Because that's who we work for. If you're -- you hear we're not living up to the highest ideals, the ideals that you just heard from Bobby, from Jason, from Darrell, you got to let me know.

And by the way, let me know before you let Mike and Ryan know, they'd get all up in my shit. Because you have earned and you deserve only our very best.

So God bless you all, God bless our nation's service members, our veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. Thank you all very much.

PRESENTATION: CIC GOLD MEDAL OF MERIT & CITATION
TO LEO HOLT, CEO, HOLT LOGISTICS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Behind Holt -- Holt Logistics, the leading provider for logistical management materials, handling and transportation on the Delaware River and surrounding areas, is our next guest, Leo Holt.

The Holt family has worked diligently since 1926 to position its company as the premier transport destination for tons of industrial and consumer products.

At the same time, Leo and his brothers Tom, Junior and Michael have worked tirelessly to position Holt Logistics as a premier supporter to all who serve, including servicemembers, veterans, members of law enforcement, first responders, and their communities throughout the entire Greater -- Greater Philadelphia and South Jersey areas.

From instituting veteran hiring initiatives and supporting local bases and military families during government shutdown, to gifting Army-Navy tickets to local veterans, and even volunteering his own fleet of trucks to help transport and deliver Toys for Tots during the holidays, Leo and his family find every avenue available to give back.

They once even retrofitted the Holt facility in order to host thousands of Afghan refugees, ensuring they had a

safe place to stay while processing.

When I learned of all this and Leo's support of the Marine Corps Law Enforcement Association, an organization provides scholarships for fallen Marine or law enforcement families, and his sponsorship of individuals who participate in the local Police Unity Tour, which helps maintain the Police Memorial Wall, I knew I had to find the most meaningful way to recognize him for his continued efforts.

So today, I'm -- I'm proud to present Leo Holt of Holt Logistics with my Commander-in-Chief Gold Medallion of Merit and Citation in appreciation of his efforts to serve all who served. Unfortunately, we had a last-minute call that Mr. Holt isn't here, but we'll read the citation.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Now it's on.

Commander-in-Chief Gold Medal of Merit and Citation awarded to Leo Holt of Holt Logistics, in sincere appreciation and esteemed recognition of the unwavering dedication and compassion he extends to America's service members, veterans, and their families, as well as to his community through the work of his family-owned company, Holt Logistics.

His steadfast commitment is evidenced by his furthering Holt Logistics mission to hire more veterans, and the generosity he displayed in ensuring support to local military communities during the government shutdown.

His staunch and continuous support of law enforcement agencies in the Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey region, along with his generosity in volunteering a Holt Logistics facility to process, feed, and temporarily house 19,000 Afghan evacuees, make him a standout leader in his community.

His efforts are held in the highest regard and have 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 the United States, this 30th day of July 2024, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief, Dan West, Adjutant General, accepted on behalf, Post Commander, Jeff Walden, and past Post Commander Luddie Austin. Department Commanders.

They're still Post Commanders.

PRESENTATION/REMARKS: VFW NATIONAL EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR
AWARDED TO DUNCAN AVIATION

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: As the world's largest privately owned business jet service provider, Duncan Aviation prides itself on prioritizing needs of business aircraft operators.

With a history of trying new ideas and an ability to innovate and transition itself into future aviation trends, Duncan Aviation believes that the most important element to customer satisfaction is the quality of its workforce, the train -- and the training its team members receive.

With nearly 3,000 employees, Duncan Aviation displays its dedication to those who have served our great nation, onboarding nearly 70 veterans last year alone.

They not only work alongside the Department of Defense's SkillBridge internship program, but also provide vital community and camaraderie through -- the through the creation of veteran employment resource groups to enrich the foster -- enrich and foster a supportive and welcoming environment towards veterans.

Duncan Aviation's continued support and fervent -- fervent dedication to enriching and improving the lives of our veterans make them a perfect recipient for the VFW's 2024 Employer of the Year Award.

An Army National Guard Veteran, head of Duncan Aviation's Veteran Employment Resource Group, and a senior sales rep in the Parts and Rotatable Sales Department, here to accept the award on behalf of Duncan Aviation, please welcome the stage Mr. Tyler Lauer.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: National Employer of the Year Award, presented to Duncan Aviation, in recognition of its exceptional support, commitment, and contributions to the veterans community as the world's largest privately owned corporate and private jet maintenance, repair, and overhaul company, employing 2,834 professionals, with nearly 23 percent of its workforce comprised of veterans or currently serving military members, demonstrate Duncan Aviation's unwavering dedication to those who have served our nation.

Its onboarding of nearly 70 veterans in 2023, with 16 stemming from its partnership with the Department of Defense SkillBridge internship program, is a testament to its proactive efforts to integrate veterans into its workforce.

By attending transition assistance classes, military career fairs, and partnering with the VA to allow veterans to utilize their education benefits as part of its apprenticeship program, it has provided invaluable support to the veteran community.

Duncan Aviation's creation of employee resource groups in each of its subdivisions designed to provide support, camaraderie, and community engagement for its veterans employees, further underscores its

commitment to fostering a supportive environment for veterans, receiving recognition in multiple states for supporting veteran employees highlights the significant impact of its initiatives, thus earning Duncan Aviation the deepest respect and gratitude of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in 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 30th day of July 2024, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant General.

MR. LAUER: Thank you. On behalf of Duncan Aviation and all the veteran team members, it is my Honor to accept the VFW National Employer -- Employer of the Year Award. Employing military veterans is something Duncan Aviation has always taken pride in. I've been there 14 years, since I got home from Iraq myself. U.S. Army.

AUDIENCE: (Sound effect.)

MR. LAUER: I do have a fellow coworker who is US Marines, so --

AUDIENCE: Hoo-rah.

MR. LAUER: Duncan, nearly 23 percent of their employees, which is about 3,000 employees, are veterans. We are currently serving in one of the -- oh, sorry about that -- that are currently serving in one of the branches, or veterans at this time.

When service members transition from their respective branches, it can create a lot of stress for them and their families. To ease the transition, Duncan Aviation has established numerous support systems to help veterans integrate into the corporate world.

At each of Duncan Aviation's main maintenance facilities, we have established an employees resource group. This is one of the groups that I had right at this time. This group fosters a supportive and inclusive environment where every member feels valued and empowered.

We encourage active participation, activities, discussions, and initiatives. Collaboration and open communication are the key to our success, and we welcome all ideas, feedback, and suggestions.

Together, we are -- we work towards our shared goals of fostering camaraderie, providing support, and promoting professional development among our members. The group also organizes veteran events at each location to build a strong veteran community and give back to the local communities.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the vision, investment, of the Duncan family.

The family-owned company was founded by Donald Duncan as a small aircraft sales organization in 1956, with just 12 people. It has since grown to become one of the largest privately owned business jet providers in the world. Yet, it has never lost the small company feel -- the small company family feel.

This stems from the philosophy of Donald's son Robert, who has always believed that taking care of our employees should be the company's top priority. He often said, if we do right by our people, they'll take care of our customers and the company will grow.

And it did.

Therefore, I also want to extend my gratitude to the Duncan Aviation -- or the Duncan family for providing a work environment filled with opportunity, growth, respect, and the support they give to all of our veterans.

As a company, we are proud of our veterans, and we are honored that they chose Duncan Aviation as their next home after their service to the nation. They're truly the ones who deserve the recognition.

Thank you.

PRESENTATION/REMARKS: CIC GOLD MEDAL OF MERIT & CITATION
TO BRIAN DALY, GUY FIERI FOUNDATION

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Last, and certainly not least, our next award recipient is a world-renowned chef and restaurateur, New York Times bestselling author, Emmy Award-winning TV host, and is one of the world's most recognizable and influential culinary stars -- stars, Guy Fieri.

What many of you don't know is Guy Fieri is a fervent -- a very -- a huge supporter of veterans and first responders through the Guy Fieri Foundation.

Started in 2011 with the simple idea of teaching the next generation of chefs how to cook, the Guy Fieri Foundation has since expanded to include programs that support first responders through disaster relief, salutes our military and veterans, and improves literacy in the community.

Through numerous events hosted across the United States, to include events at New Jersey Posts 2179 and 2290 in New Jersey, Ellsworth Air Force Base, and the Veteran's Home of California- Yountville, Guy Fieri has provided essential support and created a sense of belonging for our nation's veterans and first responders.

His generosity and compassion serve as a beacon of hope, ensuring that those who sacrifice for our society are

recognized and valued.

It is an honor to award Guy Fieri the Commander-in-Chief Gold Medal of Merit and Citation.

Here to accept the award on behalf is Mr. Brian Daly, the executive director of Guy Fieri's foundation.

Well, look, them two came -- when they came to the New Jersey Post, it was two years ago. I was junior vice commander-in-chief. Mr. Daly come in, and the foundation said, we want to feed those veterans in need.

We found the two biggest Posts in New Jersey, and we filled it, they came in, and they fed the most vulnerable veterans. That's why I learned about what they do. And as I learned more, I couldn't think of a better person to give this award to.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Commander-in-Chief Gold Medal of Merit and Citation, awarded to Guy Fieri of the Guy Fieri Foundation, in esteemed recognition of his exemplary service and dedication to veterans and first responders, his unwavering commitment to honoring and supporting our nation's veterans and first responders is truly commendable.

Through his Guy Fieri Foundation's tireless efforts, he has brought hope, joy, and assistance to those who have dedicated their lives to serving others.

His dedication shines brightly through the numerous events his foundation has hosted across the United States, including those held at VFW Posts 2179 and 2290 in New Jersey, as well as at Ellsworth Air Force Base and the Veterans Home of California-Yountville.

These gatherings not only provided essential support, but also created a sense of camaraderie and belonging for those who have sacrificed so much for our nation.

Guy's generosity knows no bounds, as he continues to uplift and empower those in need, taking time to visit with them to hear their stories, ensuring that their contributions to society are recognized and valued.

His kindness and compassion serve as a beacon of hope for veterans and first responders everywhere, reminding them that they are never alone. For his selfless devotion to the wellbeing of our nation's heroes, it is with great honor that we present him with this Gold Medal of Merit.

May it serve as a symbol of the Veterans of Foreign Wars' deepest gratitude and appreciation for his outstanding contributions to our community and country.

In witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 30th day of July 2024, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant General.

MR. DALY: Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, I is with profound gratitude and humility that I stand here before you today to accept the Commander-in-Chief Award from the Veterans of Foreign Wars on behalf of Guy Fieri and the Guy Fieri Foundation.

This award is a great honor, not only because it comes from an organization with such a storied history of service and sacrifice, but also because it represents the highest ideals of patriotism, courage, and unwavering commitment to our nation and its veterans.

The VFW has been a long pillar of support and advocacy -- advocacy for our brave men and women who have served in the armed forces. Your dedication to ensuring that veterans receive the recognition, benefits, and care they so richly deserve, is an inspiration to all of us.

The work you do echoes the values that our country was built upon, values of duty, honor, and respect. Thank you for this incredible honor. We are deeply touched and forever grateful for this recognition.

I would like to share a personal thank you from our founder, Guy Fieri, whose own father served on a submarine during the Vietnam War, and believes our veterans, active military, and their families should be recognized and appreciated every day. Without further ado, a message from our founder, Guy Fieri.

(VIDEO RECORDING PLAYED)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Woo. I'm losing it. Hold on. Let me see if I can get one. Woo.

AUDIENCE: Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: You guys are wooing me out.

CLOSING CEREMONIES

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Sergeant-at-Arms, you'll please perform the closing ceremony for today's business session.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Yes, sir, Commander-in-Chief, sir. Comrades, all rise. Comrade National Chaplain, will you lead us in our closing prayer? Uncover, parade-hut.

CHAPLAIN FREI: Heavenly Father, watch over the extraordinary men and women who fought and are still fighting to protect this great nation so we can enjoy our freedoms we treasure. We humbly ask You to watch over these heroes and protect them and their families. Amen.

AUDIENCE: Amen.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, atten-hut. Comrades, face the flag of our nation, please join me in a final salute to our colors.

Present, halt. Order, halt.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, that completes closing ceremonies of this session of the 125th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, sir.

(MEETING CONCLUDED AT 12:10P.M. ET)

BUSINESS SESSION
WEDNESDAY, JULY 31, 2024

(The Business Session of the 125th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and the 111th National Convention of the VFW Auxiliary, held in the Louisville International Convention Center, Louisville, Kentucky, was called to order on Wednesday, July 31, 2024, at 8:02 a.m., by Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento)

CALL TO ORDER
SALUTE TO COLORS
INVOCATION: NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DAVID FREI
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Comrades, take your seats. We'll all get started.

AUDIENCE: Woo. Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: No. I'm wooed out. I don't think I got it in me.

AUDIENCE: Woo. Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I'll try. You guys wooed the hell out of me last night at the thing.

AUDIENCE: Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: It's embarrassing if I try. I tried this morning looking in the mirror.

AUDIENCE: Woo. Woo. Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I need a designated wooer.

AUDIENCE: Woo. Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: But hey. Couple of announcements. Number one, is there any boatswain mates out there with a pipe? Look. Don't ask me. If you ain't Navy, you don't know what the hell I'm talking about.

If there's a -- is there any boatswain mates out there that brought their pipe? Yeah. Yeah. You got it whistling. I understand. Okay.

If I could -- before the end of the day, if Mike Klein's here, Ken Stein, Mike Lutman, come see me.

Johnny, you, Bubba, and Greg, I'd like to see you afterwards, too. I'd like a favor, if you don't mind.

One more announcement. You know, when we do All-American, sometimes it gets a little convoluted when you start a new Post, and the criteria, because they come in midyear. I want to make an announcement that Post 1225, one of our newest Posts from Guantanamo Bay, kind of got lost in the shuffle there, and Matt Mayer -- is Matt Mayer here?

Matt Mayer, congratulations. Your Post is All-American.

AUDIENCE: Woo. Woo. Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I ain't got it, man. I mean

AUDIENCE: Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I'll try.

AUDIENCE: Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Woo.

AUDIENCE: Woo. Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Where the hell am I?

I will now reconvene the 125th VFW National Convention.

Sergeant-at-Arms, you will please conduct the opening ceremonies.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Yes, sir, Comrade Commander-in-Chief, sir.

Comrades, all rise.

Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, ten-hut. Comrades facing the flag of our nation, please join me in an opening salute to our colors. Present hut. Order hut. Comrade National Chaplain, will you lead us in our opening prayer?

Uncover. Parade hut.

CHAPLAIN FREI: Almighty God, we ask that you -- we ask that you come to be with us today.

Our business is important as we honor those who have served the VFW well. We are blessed because of them. We also ask that you be with us as we nominate officers for this year. May they be the right people for the right jobs. We ask this for the greater good of all comrades. Amen.

AUDIENCE: Amen.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, ten-hut.
Cover.

Comrades facing the flag of our nation, please join me in our pledge of allegiance.

AUDIENCE: I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Order hut. Comrade Commander-in-Chief, that completes opening ceremonies of this session of the 125th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: National—thank you sir. National Sergeants, right face. Forward hut.

CONVENTION CREDENTIALS REPORT: BETTY GRIPP

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you, Sergeant-at-Arms. Everyone, please be seated.

I would like to now call on Betty Gripp for her report of the convention committee.

AUDIENCE: Betty. Betty. Betty. Betty. Betty. Betty. Betty. Woo. Woo.

COMRADE GRIPP: Good morning, Commander-in-Chief, National Officers, Delegates.

As of close-of-business yesterday at 12:00 p.m., July 30th, 2024, total Delegates registered—their credentials are registered Delegate strength.

Delegates, 8,960. Department Commanders, 46. Past Commander-in-Chief, 15. National Officers, 52.

Grand total, 9,700—excuse me -- 9,073.

Total registered for the 125th National Convention, 2,018 that were present.

Commander-in-Chief, this is my final credentials report, and it was a pleasure to serve.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you, Betty.

COMRADE GRIPP: Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you.

AUDIENCE: Love you, Betty.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you, Betty, for your usual tremendous work.

Along with those afterwards, Dave Young, if you could see me after this? And Lauren, from the DPA, if you don't mind, come up when this is all said and done, if you're not busy. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: DR. TAHINA MONTOYA, SR. ADVISOR, VETERANS & MILITARY ENGAGEMENT LIAISON, WHITE HOUSE OFFICE OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I would like to welcome an Air Force veteran with over 16 years of experience working at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels within the United States and abroad, including two deployments in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

Dr. Tahina Montoya is a senior advisor for the White House -- for the White House Office of Public Engagement, where she serves as the veterans and military engagement liaison.

She has served as a woman veteran policy fellow at the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and most recently served as strategic advisor, veteran experience office at the Department of Veterans' Affairs, and special assistant to the assistant secretary of the Air Force (Manpower & Reserve Affairs).

The White House flew her all the way out here for this message, so let's please give a warm VFW welcome to Dr. Tahina Montoya.

DR. MONTOYA: Good morning, everyone. Thank you so much for that lovely introduction.

I am Tahina Montoya, senior advisor at the White House Office of Public Engagement, and it is a sincere honor to be here with you-all, especially during your 125th National Convention.

As mentioned, I have served for over 16 years, 12 of which were active duty, and I continue to serve as an Air Force reservist. I am -- I am also a proud active-duty spouse. My husband, Eduardo, who's watching via the live stream, enlisted at 17, was selected to attend the Naval Academy, and is currently serving as a commander in the United States Navy.

I wanted to take a brief moment to extend sincere personal and heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you. Your sacrifice, your work, and your advocacy has opened doors for future generations of veterans, veterans like me, but I'm not here to talk about me.

I am here on behalf of President Biden to celebrate your momentous anniversary and to recognize the role the

VFW, all of you, have played in the advances this administration has been able to make for veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.

It includes the tenacity of the VFW legislative team, including Patrick and Brittany Murray, Katherine Cassel, Tammy Barlet, and Kristina Keenan, whose advocacy ensured veterans' voice were heard on Capitol Hill. This includes people like Tim Borland, who was on stage with President Biden on August 2022 for the signing of the PACT Act.

It also includes the resolve of people like your VFW Commander-in-Chief, Duane Sarmiento, who made it a priority to ensure that the Veteran Scam and Fraud Evasion Initiative launched in November of 2023 included the need to address and mitigate the work of non-accredited predatory actors, something he avidly pushed for when he testified in front of the House and Senate Veteran Armed Services Committees this past March.

The VFW has and continues to play a critical role in the advances made in the veteran space, and it is with great honor that I stand before you to read and hand-deliver a letter from the President of the United States.

It reads, "I extend my best wishes to everyone attending the 125th Veterans of Foreign Wars National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky. In my message to this convention during my first year in office, I vowed to do everything in my power to address the cost of war our veterans face.

That's because I believe America has one truly sacred obligation, to prepare and equip those we send into harm's way, and to care for them and their loved ones once they come home.

"Thanks to each of you, we took a giant step towards fulfilling that obligation when I signed the PACT Act, the most significant law expanding benefits and healthcare for veterans in more than 30 years.

It will help millions of veterans who were exposed to toxic substances during their service, help them get VA benefits they deserve. "We would not have gotten that law passed without the VFW.

Together, we're taking additional steps to ensure veterans are protected. For example, I announced the VSAFE Initiative to help safeguard veterans and their families from predatory scams. No one who served our country should be defrauded by those they fought to defend. "For all the progress we have made, I know we have to do more.

That's why I am so grateful for organizations like the VFW. Since it was founded in 1899, the VFW has been a powerful voice on behalf of those who risk everything for all of us.

From calling on our country to expand benefits for veterans exposed to Agent Orange to fighting to improve VA facilities and services, the VFW has had our veterans' backs through thick and thin, and together, we are going to keep working to meet the needs of brave women and men who serve or have served our nation in uniform, as well as their families.

"To everyone gathered for this critical convention, thank you for everything you do to support our country's heroes. It is because of people like you that I have never been more optimistic about the future of our nation. We just have to remember who we are, the United States of America.

There is nothing beyond our capacity when we act together. May God bless each of you, and may he protect our troops." Signed, Joe Biden. Mr. Sarmiento, VFW leadership, and to all of you, our nation's heroes, thank you for your time this morning, and congratulations on your 125th anniversary.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: By the way, Tahina is the newest member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. She signed up this morning. I call Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt to the podium. I have business over with the Auxiliary.

AUDIENCE: Woo. Woo. Woo. Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I got to save it.

AUDIENCE: Woo. Woo. Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: One more time.

AUDIENCE: Woo. Woo. Yay.

INTRODUCTION: VFW NATIONAL HONOR GUARD & VFW NATIONAL SERGEANT -AT-ARMS

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LIPPHARDT: I'm looking for my place. Good morning, all.

AUDIENCE: Good morning.

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LIPPHARDT: Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like -- I would now like to express my appreciation to two groups of elite individuals, Veterans of Foreign Wars National Honor Guard team and VFW Sergeant-at-Arms team.

Our Honor Guard team plays a vital role -- yes, please.

Our Honor Guard team plays a vital role each year at the National Convention to include arranging the colors for the Council of Administration meetings, presenting the colors for the annual joint memorial service, participating as

a unit in the Patriotic Rally, and as the last function of the convention, retiring the colors.

Our Sergeants-at-Arms team, year after year, do a superlative job at ensuring the order of our national meetings and events. They're often the first to arrive and the last to leave.

VFW National Sergeant-at-Arms Brian Willette has been a member of the Sergeant-at-Arms since 2016. He is a Gold Legacy Life 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, and he currently serves as a Department Sergeant-at-Arms.

Brian has been a member of the Honor Guard team since 2019. Brian retired from the United States Army.

AUDIENCE: (sound effect)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LIPPHARDT: That's what I thought I heard. As a staff Sergeant, he completed his basic infantry and airborne training in 1983 and served with both the 24th Infantry Division and the 3rd Armored Division.

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.

Please join me in welcoming VFW National Sergeant Arms -- Sergeant-at-Arms Brian Willette.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Thank you very much, Chief, for that introduction, and it is my honor to be introducing the next two teams you're going to see here.

It's now my privilege to invite the National Honor Guard team to the stage for introductions. National Honor Guard, advance to the stage to be recognized.

Our captain, Ronald Servary, serves as a captain of National Honor Guard. Ron has been -- is a -- Ron is from the Department of Maryland as a Gold Legacy Life member of Post 521. Ron has been a member of the Honor Guard for 22 years, serving as captain for 18 of those years.

Jay Cabacar is from Maryland and is a Life member of Post 5471. He's been a member of the Honor Guard since 2009.

Kathy Carlson is from the Department of Maryland as a Life member of Post 160 and has been a member of the Honor Guard since 2015.

Marco de la Rosa is from the Department of Georgia and is -- and is a Life member of Post 660 and has been a member of the Honor Guard since 2015.

Mark Herron is from the Department of Missouri and is a Life member of Post 5789 and has been a member of the Honor Guard since 2016.

Alfred Simmons, who was not able to be with us here today, is from the Department of Maryland, and is a Gold Legacy Life member of Post 8509. Al is a member of the Honor Guard since 1994. He recently retired from the Honor Guard this past Memorial Day, and I know these guys miss him.

We thank you for his many years of service. If you're looking out there, Al, thank you.

Edward Smith is from the Department of Delaware and is a Life member of Post 2863. He has been a member of the Honor Guard since 2010.

Mary Spencer is from the Department of Kansas and is a Life member of Post 56 and has been a member of the Honor Guard since 2020.

Unfortunately, unable to be with us here today is Clinton Slack from the Department of Delaware. He's a Life member of Post 475. He has been a member of the Honor Guard since 2006.

They miss you here too, Clint.

This is a truly incredible team, and on behalf of the entire Veterans of Foreign Wars, we thank you for your service. Let's give them another round of applause.

National Sergeants, advance to the stage and be recognized.

Joy Ausman has been a member of the Sergeants-at-Arms for 28 years and is a Gold Legacy Life member of Gilbert, Minnesota Post 4456. She is also a 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 and earned -- and earned her eligibility in Operation Desert Storm. She recently returned from her third tour in the Peace Corps as a volunteer in Swaziland, Africa.

Jim Galen has been a member of the Sergeants-at-Arms for 23 years and is a Life member of Post 6802 in Richmond, Michigan. He's a -- he's a past All-State Post Commander, a past All-State Quartermaster and has served as Post Quartermaster for 19 years and is the past District 5 Commander.

Jim is the United States Army veteran of the Vietnam War. Jim retired after 30 years of service at General Motors, and he's a Tigers ticket holder, also.

Keith MacDonald has been a member of the Sergeants-at-Arms for 30 years. He is our senior Sergeant and is a Life member of Post -- and he's a Life member of Post 5667 in Lakeside, California. He returned to the -- he retired from the United States Navy after more than 23 years as a senior chief petty officer.

He earned his -- he earned his eligibility in the VFW while serving aboard the USS Rentz during Operation Ernest Will and Operation Nimble Archer. Keith is the past All-American Post 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. He recently moved to Buckeye, Arizona.

George Lott has been a member of the Sergeants-at-Arms for 15 years. He is a Gold Legacy Life member and past Commander of the Lieutenant Robert A. Madden Post 10152 in Ogdensburg, New Jersey, and past New Jersey -- he's also a past District 21 Commander in New Jersey.

He's a United States Army combat veteran of the Vietnam War. He was also an army drill Sergeant in Fort Dix, New Jersey upon his return from Vietnam. After serving for 33 years as Department -- I'm sorry. After serving 33 years as the Department of New Jersey State Sergeant-at-Arms, George retired in June of 2021.

He was employed as a police officer in his hometown of Ogdensburg for 34 years, and he retired in 2008 as the chief.

Next is Lora Land.

Lora is a Gold Legacy Life member of the Benjamin O. Davis Post 9191 in Killeen, Texas. She is a member of the Sergeants-at-Arms since November 2016 and is a past All-State and All-American Post Commander. In 2015, Lora was named the top commander in the State of Texas and was the first woman veteran to serve as a District 14 Commander, where she achieved All-State and All-American Honors.

She served as the Women's Veteran Chair for the Department of Texas from 2016 to 2018 and served as a National Aide-de-Camp in 2017 to 2018.

In 2022, Lora was appointed to oversee -- I'm sorry, stand-up the -- stand-up operations of the first VFW Post on the largest military installation in the United States, the CS -- Command Sergeant Major A.C. Cotton VFW Post 12209 in then Fort Hood, Texas, which is the first VFW Post to be allowed to open in the State of Texas on an active military installation.

Sherrod Nathan Conyers is a native of Marietta, Georgia, and is a Gold Legacy Life member. He's a Gold -- he's a Gold Legacy Life member of the VFW 42nd Rainbow Division Post 2681. He currently serves as Georgia's Department Judge Advocate.

He has been a member of the Sergeants-at-Arms for nine years. Sherrod's military career began after becoming a Direct Commission Lieutenant -- Second Lieutenant from the Tuskegee University's ROTC program into the United States Army.

Sherrod earned his VFW eligibility with deployments in Jordan and Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom and to Iraq during operation Iraqi Freedom as an ordinance officer. 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 Incorporated, a member of the 200 Corinthians Masonic Lodge, and was commissioned as Honorable Kentucky Colonel. He currently is an associate of Boston Consulting Group as a wave manager and serves -- a full-time spouse and father of two.

Rene Fuertes has been a member of the Sergeants-at-Arms since 2021. He is a Gold Legacy Life member of Post 3104 in South Hadley, Massachusetts, and a three-time past Commander of Post 3389 in Randolph, Mass.

He received -- he has received appointments as Assistant Inspector General, Special Aide-de-Camp, and was named Massachusetts Member of the Year for 2018 and 2021.

He currently serves as a member of the State Honor Guard and as a Department Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms. Rene recently received the VFW Department of Massachusetts 2023-24 VFW Patriotism Award at the 2024 Department Convention just this -- just this summer.

Rene completed bootcamp in 1986 at the Naval Training Center in San Diego, California. He earned his VFW eligibility in Operation Uphold Democracy in 1994 and later deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

He received three Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medals, two Coast Guard Achievement Medals, and the Coast Guard Meritorious Unit Commendation with operational distinguished service. Rene retired from the United States Navy as petty officer second class and has been employed by the State of Massachusetts for 34 years as an investigator.

Todd Hokanson has been a member of the Sergeants-at-Arms for three years. He's a Gold Legacy Life member of the Lucius-Penick Medal of Honor Post -- VFW Post 430 in Canyon, Texas. He earned his VFW eligibility during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

Todd is a past two-time All-State "Captain" Post Commander, as a -- is a past 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 more than 24 years of service.

He was a field artilleryman for six years and a military policeman for 18. He deployed in Desert Storm and Desert Shield, Bosnia, Operation Joint Guard, Korea, Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq in 2003 to 2004 and again in 2006 to 2008.

Todd was awarded several awards during his career, including the Legion of Merit, two Bronze Stars, and a Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal. He received several leadership awards, including the Major General Aubrey "Red" Newman Leadership Award. We're also joined by Zephyr accompanying Todd, and Zephyr is a deputized National Sergeant.

There is Zephyr.

The integrity for which this team operates is second to none, and I'm really proud of their service and their -- and I'm proud to be their Sergeant.

Let's give another round of applause.

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LIPPHARDT: These two groups of men and women 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.

All of you consistently represent the organization well. I am proud of the professional way in which you conduct yourselves, and I am honored to have the opportunity to serve with you. On behalf of the entire organization, thank you again for your service.

Let's give them a final round of applause.

INTRODUCTION: PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEFS

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LIPPHARDT: It is now my honor to introduce the past chiefs who are attending this convention. Some of them may be sitting in the -- in the hall, and I would ask them, if they're sitting in the hall, to please rise and be acknowledged when I call your name.

For those on the stage here, please do the same.

If you can't tell, I'm delaying.

From 1988 to 1989, from the great State of Louisiana, Larry W. Rivers. Where are you, Chief?

1991 to 1992, Robert E. Wallace. Thank you, Chief.

From 1995-1996, from the great State of Massachusetts, Paul A. Spera. Thank you, Chief.

1996-1997, from Texas, James E. Nier.

1997-1998, from Ohio, John E. Moon. Thank you, Chief.

From 1998 to 1999 from the great State of Montana, Thomas A. Pouliot. Thank you, sir.

2010-2011, from California, Richard L. Eubank. Thank you.

And 2012-2013, from great State of Florida, John E. Hamilton.

2013-2014, great State of Indiana, William A. Thien.

2014-2015, from the great State of Nevada, John W. Stroud. Thank you, Chief.

2016-2017, from the great State of Kentucky, Brian J. Duffy.

2017-2018, from the great State of Ohio, Keith E. Harman. Did I miss the OH part?

AUDIENCE: No.

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LIPPHARDT: That's what I thought I did. Okay.

2018-2019, from the great State of New Mexico, Vincent "BJ" Lawrence. 2019-2020.

From the great State of New York, William "Doc" Schmitz.

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LIPPHARDT: 2020-2021, Harold -- oh, from the great State of Virginia, Harold "Hal" Roesch.

And our last past Commander-in-Chief on the list who's here today, here this week, 2022-2023, from the great State of Arizona, Timothy M. Borland. Thank you.

That's, you know -- this is -- I have the utmost respect and admiration for every single past chief, be they living or passed. When you think about the 125 years we've been in existence and the leadership that has gone through, you understand what it is to be a leader of this organization.

Let's see. At this time, I am going to go do this.

You don't know what this is?

I don't know what this is.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yep. There we go.

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LIPPHARDT: Okay. I got it.

ANNOUNCEMENT: NOMINATIONS OF NATIONAL HOME BOARD OF TRUSTEES

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LIPPHARDT: Since 1925, the VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids, Michigan, has remained a prominent representation of the absolute best that the Veterans of Foreign Wars and its Auxiliary has to offer.

There is no better example of how our organizations work together to support America's military families than by the services offered by the VFW National Home. 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.

There are two nominations for District 7 for the '24 to -- 2024 to 2030 term, representing Iowa, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.

John Griffith has been a VFW National Home life member since March 2005. He is endorsed by the Department of Michigan.

Michelle Rathke has been a VFW National Home life member since October 2016. She is endorsed by the VFW Department of Wisconsin.

There are four nominations for District 11 for the 2024 to 2030 term, representing Arizona, Colorado, Utah, and Nevada.

Dennis Parizek has been a VFW National Home life member since May 1997. He is endorsed by the VFW Department of Utah.

Carla Martinez has been a VFW National Home life member since August of 2015. She is endorsed by the VFW Department of Utah Auxiliary.

Renee Thayer has been a VFW National Home life member since July 2021. She is endorsed by the VFW Department of Nevada Auxiliary.

Connie Hargreaves has been a VFW National Home life member since March 2021. She is endorsed by the VFW Department of Arizona Auxiliary.

And that is the list that -- it's just been read into the record. We're not voting here, but I wanted to get it -- want to get it on record.

ANNOUNCEMENT: NATIONAL BUDDY POPPY CONTEST WINNERS

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LIPPHARDT: So now, I want to go to the winners of the National Buddy Poppy Contest and silent auction results and the Vander Clute Motorcycle Ride check presentation. And to do that is their director of programs, Lynn Rolf.

Please welcome Lynn to the podium.

DIRECTOR ROLF: Good morning, comrades.

AUDIENCE: Good morning.

DIRECTOR ROLF: Hey, what a great show last night.

Great showing for all the comrades and Auxiliary members, right? I know you know that, especially those of us that have spent some late nights in the barracks and -- and overseas, it's always great to razz each other. It really helps take the stress off of you. Sorry. I'm trying to find my piece.

Okay.

So up on the screen, you're going to see our winners.

Without question, one of the most recognizable symbols around the world is a VFW Buddy Poppy. To VFW and our Auxiliary members, the Poppy is much more than a flower.

For us, 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 has distributed the revered Buddy Poppy to millions of Americans every year.

Today, we're going to take a few moments to honor and recognize those whose passion and extreme creativity have taken the Buddy Poppy display to the next level. These are individuals and Posts who have used our Buddy Poppies in the creation of exceptional and inspiring works of art and displays.

Hopefully each and every one of you have actually gone by there this week and actually seen the incredible

talent of our Auxiliary and our Post members.

In category one -- and again, please look at the screen, for public promotion of the Buddy Poppy campaign.

Honorable mention goes to VFW Auxiliary -- to the G.L. Adrain Owen Post 5993 in Ava, Missouri.

Our third place award goes to VFW Scott Post 4183 in Belleville, Illinois.

Second place award goes to VFW Hancock County 5117 in Carthage, Illinois. If you can't tell, Illinois took all of their allotted slots they could.

And the first place winner is VFW Browerville Post 8391 and its Auxiliary in Browerville, Minnesota.

Next up, category two for the use of poppies in memorial and the inspirational display. Honorable mention goes to the VFW Auxiliary to the Buckon-Gehannon Post 3663 in Buckhannon, West Virginia.

Third place award goes to the VFW Auxiliary to the Hubble Delk Levy Memorial Post 11474 in North Little Rock, Arkansas.

The second place award goes to the VFW Auxiliary to the Glen L. Jeffers Post 4 in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina.

And the first place is VFW Auxiliary to Sergeant Nicholas C. Mason Memorial Post 12202 in King George, Virginia.

Next for category three, the artistic and decorative use of the Buddy Poppy. Honorable mention goes to the VFW Hometown-Murray Post 9773 and its Auxiliary, and another Illinois Buddy Poppy.

Our third place award goes to the VFW Red Bud Post 6632, and its Auxiliary in Red Bud Illinois.

The second place award goes to the VFW Oscar Joyner VFW Post 5352 and its Auxiliary in Kernersville, North Carolina.

First place award goes to the VFW Private Allen J. Beck Post 5265 and its Auxiliary in Spring Grove, Pennsylvania.

And last, but certainly not least, my award, the Director's Award, that I personally thought that best reflects the best use of the Buddy Poppy program.

I'm pleased to announce the Director Award is the Native -- Native Auxiliary to Earl W. Homer Memorial Post 7678 in Cottage Hills, Illinois. Okay.

For this year's silent auction, 31 Departments have donated items. Many reflect their home states and commonwealths. For more than two decades, this auction has raised money for issues that are close to the heart of our VFW and its Auxiliary.

Everyone knows that I bleed the VFW programs, so I'm proud to announce that this year we raised nearly \$8,000 thanks to your gifts. Another big support this week, we had our Vander Clute Riders this week. I'd like to bring James Holmes to present a check to Duane.

Al, if you wouldn't mind.

This ride started well over 25 years ago from our past Commander-in-Chief and Adjutant General Howard E. Vander Clute to travel across the country. We have one comrade that has been to every single one.

Comrade James Holmes, I've asked him to present the check to our incoming Commander-in-Chief.

As you can see, the check -- nearly \$13,000.

Last two things -- and I know the comrades from Missouri and Louisiana are really excited to hear this announcement. I cannot thank you enough for embracing our cornhole initiative these past two years.

As you know, we're raising funds to assist our NVS staff in all of endeavors as we tackle the PACT Act assistance endeavor. I am proud to announce, before I tell you, that Missouri swept all the championships this weekend. If you're interested in playing next year, get signed up.

If you want to sponsor some boards, you get to keep the boards. Last year, we raised about \$31,000 in three days. This year, I'm proud to announce, we raised over \$34,000 because of you-all. Thank you. Huge.

And last but not least, please talk about your newest program, your Combat Tested Gaming network. Over 1600 VFW and veterans are playing every day. We have saved six lives so far.

You should be so proud of this new initiative. Please talk about it. Let these comrades know. It's not just the young. I've got two Korean War vets that are on there, talking more crap to the younger vets, and kicking their butt every night. So it's not a young thing. It's a veteran thing, so God bless you, comrades.

See you in Columbus. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Comrades, I stand up here today representing the Howard Vander Clute Memorial Ride. Let me tell you a little bit of information about it and about Howard himself.

The ride was started in 2000 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Well, I missed that one, and I missed the next one because I didn't have a bike. Well, in 2002, we got a bike, and I started riding the convention, that Vander Clute Ride, and done it every year since. 22 years. I missed COVID year because we canceled it.

Anyway, it's near and dear to my heart. I know Howard's widow personally, and Howard was a great individual. And this is why the ride was named after him. He's a past National Commander. He's also a past national Adjutant General.

I met him in 1992 when he came to my small Post in Kearney, Missouri to help us dedicate it when we opened the Post home.

I believe in this ride. It presents camaraderie, and it's great for me to see guys that I have seen do this ride over the years. Every year, I look forward to seeing them, and when I don't see them, I always ask someone from their Department where they're at and how they're doing.

I would encourage everyone sitting in this room to -- if you have riders in your Post, in your state, in your District, to get involved. You -- I'll tell you, you-all have no clue how much money is raised on two wheels. People will come out and support whatever benefit you're doing or whatever you're raising money for, especially if it's a good cause.

We also do all kinds of different things on motorcycles besides riding around. You know, we do funeral escorts. We escort the Wall when it's coming into our Departments or our states, wherever they're at. And I'd encourage everyone to get involved at rides, and if you don't ride, you know somebody that does.

Encourage them to do it. Believe me, you -- it's one hell of a lot of satisfaction in doing what I do. I've been riding since 1973. That's a long time. I've had two major accidents, but I'm still out there doing it. And I look forward to Columbus next year, and I hope to hell we have a hell of a lot more than 70 motorcycles participate.

Thank you.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: PAT DAILEY, FOUNDER,
TUN TAVERN LEGACY FOUNDATION

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LIPPARDT: And now, can you still see me? You may have seen me getting on and off the box. It reminds me of that "Blood on the Risers," since a riser in -- I didn't want to have any blood up here on this riser.

So the Tun Tavern is one of the nation's most historic buildings. It opened in 1693 along Philadelphia's waterfront, the iconic birthplace of six organizations, to include the United States Marine Corps.

AUDIENCE: (sound effect)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LIPPARDT: And the United States Navy.

AUDIENCE: (sound effect)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LIPPARDT: (coughs) Excuse me.

In addition, the Tun boasts several visits from the nation's founding fathers, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and many others, before it found itself in a state of disrepair and knocked down in 1781.

Today, the Tun Tavern Legacy Foundation's mission is to reestablish the Tun as it was in its heyday, a functioning mariner's tavern, continuing its legacy of craft beer, good food, camaraderie, and the preservation of history, a mission it is accomplishing, thanks in large part to our next guests.

Pat Dailey is the founder of the Tun Legacy Foundation. Patrick served as a Marine Officer with both the 3rd Marine Division and the 1st Marine Air Wing from 1981 to 1985. He has served on the Philadelphia Board of the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation since 2001.

Ken Hopper began his Marine Corps career in May 1979 and served 30 years before retiring in June 2009 as a colonel in the Marine Corps. He earned his naval aviator wings in 1982 and primarily flew the KC-130 aircraft. He served in various roles up to the Joint Staff.

He had multiple combat deployments and a tour with the United States Naval Flight Demonstration Team, the Blue Angels, piloting the team's C-130 aircraft, Fat Albert. He has accumulated over 10,000 flight hours, qualifying to fly in six different aircraft. He is currently the president and CEO of the Marine Corps Reserve Association and the CEO of the National Marine Corps Coordinating Council.

Now, please welcome to the stage, Marine Corps veterans and members of the Tun Tavern Legacy Foundation Board of Directors, Pat Dailey and retired Colonel Ken Hooper -- Hopper. Please.

LIEUTENANT DAILEY: Thank you. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Good morning, Marines.

AUDIENCE: (sound effect)

LIEUTENANT DAILEY: They always know we're in the building. As he mentioned, my name is Pat Dailey. Colonel Hopper couldn't be with us this morning. He had a return home to Tennessee his -- for business he had to attend to there, so I'm on my own.

Hopefully, I won't bore you for the next ten minutes, but I'm here to talk about a project that I have been researching for about nine years. There's a lot of nonsense on the Internet about Tun Tavern, and I -- I'm trying to get only the facts out there so that we can set the story right.

So up in front of you, there are three phrases there. I'd like you to think about those.

What if there was a restaurant where the profit from every meal served was donated to veteran- focused charities? What if there was a tavern where the profit from every drink served helped pay for the care of a hospitalized child?

And what if there was a place that honors and celebrates ordinary Americans, like yourselves, who demonstrate the extraordinary quality of service above self by their actions? We intend to bring that place back to life. It was the Tun Tavern in Philadelphia. It stood from 1693 until 1781.

So in 100 years, it was probably literally falling down, and the land it stood on was more valuable than the tavern itself, so it was demolished. It was pulled down in 1781. It was not burned down, as the Internet often says, because we have the evidence from the newspapers at the time.

So in 1673, a young man with a very good education and a small inheritance left England for the island of Barbados. In about ten years, he made a significant fortune selling a white powdery substance from the Caribbean, but it's not what you think.

It's sugar. Sugar was the oil of its day, and Barbados had the best soil in the world for growing more sugar than anywhere else. So the English had developed a taste for sugar, and Barbados was therefore a strategic island for them to hold. So they had British forces in Barbados, and they also had a local militia, sort of a national guard.

The problem was, Samuel Carpenter was a Quaker, a very devout Quaker, and a resolute pacifist, and he would not allow his men or any members of his family to join the local militia. That did not sit well with the other Englishmen who lived on Barbados, so after burning his warehouses a few times and finding him quite literally tons of sugar, when he was fined 6,000 tons of sugar, he decided to cash out because he heard of a new settlement in North America started by another Quaker, William Penn, and a city called Philadelphia that was just a very small settlement at the time.

So he cashed out. He took his cash, and he got on a boat, and he went to Philadelphia. He showed up in Philadelphia just about a year after William Penn had first got there. William Penn had a real problem. He had all this land he was allowed to develop as a developer for the King, but he had no money. Mr. Carpenter and his cash showed up exactly at the right time.

Penn had land. Carpenter had money. They became trusted companions and business partners in more than a few ventures. And partner -- I'm sorry.

Carpenter really made his money in Philadelphia, not in agriculture as he had in Barbados, but in logistics. He built the first pier into the Delaware. On that pier, he put warehouses. And next to those warehouses, he built a tavern because his brother was a master brewer.

The tavern was Tun Tavern.

So what is a tun? A tun is actually a wooden container that holds about 250 gallons of liquid. It's hard to find a real tun nowadays. They do exist. Most of what you see are barrels or kegs or flask. They're all units of measure of wooden vessels, but a tun is the largest.

It weighs about 2,000 pounds. Hence, the modern use of the word tun, when it's full of beer or wine.

And it's -- oh, there we go. So this, we believe, was what Tun Tavern looked like. It stood on Water Street. This is sort of a very artistic view of it.

It's not exactly correct. Every image that we have of Tun Tavern was drawn 100 years after it was gone, so this is the best guess of what it looked like. There are similar buildings in Philadelphia that were made by the same builder, so this building reflects aspects of it.

And there's a fair amount of history -- written history about the tavern itself, the physical characteristics. This is what we are planning to build in Philadelphia.

This tavern will stand about 200 meters from the original site. In the history of this tavern, at one point in the 1740s through the 1770s, it was called Peggy Mullan's Beef Steak Club.

Beef steak clubs were all the rage in England in the 1720s, 1730s, where wealthy merchants and actors would essentially rent the second floor of a restaurant, and with their circle of friends, they formed a beef steak club and would just gorge themselves on beef and wine and whatnot.

Ms. Mullan decided Philadelphia needed a beef steak club, and so she -- on many nights of the week, they had Peg Mullan's Beef Steak Club at this tavern. It was so famous for its food that most members of the Continental Congress have actually written about this.

The best place to get a meal in Philadelphia was Peggy Mullan's Beef Steak Club at Tun Tavern. When they

elected George Washington to lead the Continental Army against the British, they did their Huzzahs in what we now call Independence Hall, and then they took him to this tavern for his celebratory dinner.

And this is where he turned to Patrick Henry and said, "I fear this appointment may be my undoing."

Tun Tavern was also the first meeting -- it -- it's the first -- the first official or the first verified Masonic lodge in North America. And how sure are they that it is? Well, they have the minutes booked from the first meeting in 1730. So for the Freemasons in Pennsylvania, this is their birthplace, and it is the first verified Masonic lodge in North America.

It's also where benevolent -- benevolent societies helped people from three different countries get started in America. The Society of St. George for indigent Englishmen that were showing up in Philadelphia, it helped them get started. Society of St. Andrew did the same for the Scots, and the Sons of St. Patrick, did it, of course, for the Irish.

It's also on the second floor of this tavern where John Adams wrote the rules for what became the United States Navy. John Adams was the head of the Naval Committee. He and six other members of Congress came to the second floor of Tun Tavern because it was a patriot tavern, and they didn't want what they were talking about to get out to the British spies that were all throughout Philadelphia.

So on the second floor of this, they drafted the rules for the United States Navy, and many of those rules are still in effect. And of course, one of the more famous is if you wanted to be a Marine in 1775, you had to come to this tavern and sign up.

Samuel Nicholas, the first Marine, and Thomas Mullen -- Robert Mullen, the second Marine, were Masonic fraternity brothers. So they decided to use Mullen's tavern as a recruitment home for Marines, and it was at Tun Tavern that Marines literally sailed to Philadelphia and signed up to be Marines.

In the -- in the Navy of the day, you needed Marines to get between the sailors and the officers. Sailors of that day are not like the sailors of today. Sailors of that day were off and running from the law or unskilled workers, and so here, you're putting them on a gunboat and giving them weapons and sending them out. And what you need to do is kill the three officers, and suddenly, we're all pirates.

That is not the case. Marines were there to keep order on the ship and to serve as gunners on the -- in the mast and help with the gunners on the ship itself.

So this is real. This is happening.

This has been attempted five times in the last 100 years. It did succeed once, where they built a wooden structure that looked like Tun Tavern for the centennial celebration in 1925.

It was temporary. It was not near where Tun Tavern was located, and it was taken down in 1926 at the end of it, but this is really happening this time. This is the first time that all six of those groups I mentioned have joined a coalition that I started.

So all six groups still exist, and all six are contributing to make this a reality. We are -- have our groundbreaking this November 10th. It'll be in Philadelphia. It'll be at the site, which is right around the corner from the marker. It'll be a two-day party. November 9th is a black-tie event at the Masonic Temple in Philadelphia. November 10th is a street party at the site of the Tun Tavern.

Most importantly to this group and most veterans, all profits from the operations of Tun Tavern will be donated to veteran charities, Masonic charities, like the Shriners hospitals, and scholarships that the three saint organizations do now presently operate in perpetuity.

And for my Marine brothers, that means forever.

So lastly, I'll close with, this is the sign that exists in Philadelphia on Front Street, marking the location of the Tavern. It's not exactly correct, but it's very close.

Every year on November 10th, we're not sure who, but somebody puts a wreath on this sign. People come from all over to photograph themselves. It's probably the most photographed marker in Pennsylvania.

Are we sure that -- we get often asked by people who are not veterans and not Marines, do you really think people are going to come to see yet another old tavern in Philadelphia?

I think this is a pretty good answer. If you sit in your car near this marker, I guarantee you because I've done it multiple times, every 20 or 30 minutes somebody drives by, jumps out of their car, and takes a selfie with this marker, gets back in their car, and gets back on 95.

So thank you for your time. We would appreciate the support of VFW members. Many of our board members are VFW members, and I look forward to having a beer with you at Tun Tavern. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: That was pretty weak, but, I mean, all right.

Now, look. Hold on. I got to find out -- we skipped around a little bit.

Be happy we are here. I just went over to visit the Auxiliary. It's a fricking sauna over there. It's got to be a bazillion degrees. I mean, holy crap.

With the hat -- I mean, look, I'm sweating through my hat. I don't know what

happened. I mean, did they not pay the -- I was in the Navy. Hat. Cover.
It's been a long time. Cover. Liberty call.
That's -- all right. Hey, let's get moving. We get the hell out of here.

PRESENTATION/REMARKS: CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION TO
2023-2024 NATIONAL CHIEF OF STAFF CAREY PRITCHETT

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: VFW Bronze Legacy Life member Carey Pritchett served the United States Air Force from 1979 to 1986, and then spent the next 35 years serving in the Air Force Reserve, earning his VFW eligibility in Southwest Asia and Grenada.

He's been a VFW member for 40 years and is a member of Post 5579 in Gibbstown, New Jersey. Carey has served selflessly in positions at the Post, District, and Department levels, and is an All-American Department Commander.

I was honored to appoint him as National Chief of Staff in '23-'24. He has been a vital member of my leadership team and someone I call, without a doubt, a good friend. I'm proud to present him with the Certificate of Appreciation.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Certificate of Appreciation presented to Carey Pritchett, VFW Post 5579, Department of New Jersey Chief of Staff, 2023-2024.

In recognition of this exceptional dedication and service as the Chief of Staff of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, his unwavering commitment to the mission, and his steadfast leadership and counsel have significantly contribute to the success of the organization.

A member since 1984, his decades of service and loyalty serve as an inspiration to us all. His contributions have not only strengthened our communities but have served to honor the legacy of America's veterans. For this, he has justly earned the deepest appreciation 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 31st day of July 2024, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant General.

CHIEF OF STAFF PRITCHETT: Okay. I want to thank Duane very much. It's been an honor to serve with you, and I thank you for the appointment.

To everybody out in the audience, the Departments I visited, I hope I helped you in some way, shape, or form. I want to thank you for your hospitality and all your generosity throughout the year. Thank you.

PRESENTATION/REMARKS: CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION TO
2023-2024 NATIONAL INSPECTOR GENERAL PETE MASCETTI

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Life member Pete Mascetti served 22 years in the U.S. Army.

AUDIENCE: Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: (sound effect) What the hell is that -- earning his eligibility in Operation Desert Storm. He's been a VFW member for more than 30 years, and I was proud to appoint him as National Inspector General at the beginning of my term as Commander-in-Chief.

Pete is a member of Post 27 in Wiesbaden, Germany. Having served at the Post, District, and Department levels, he was the Department of Europe Commander in 2001 and '02, where he earned the prestigious Triple Crown, All-American status. Pete is the top membership recruiter, single-handedly recruiting more than 4,000 members. He was named VFW National Recruiter of the Year in 2006 and in 2008.

Pete was an integral part of my leadership team and someone I can count on for advice and counsel. I am honored to present Pete with this Certificate of Appreciation.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Certificate of Appreciation presented to Peter J. Mascetti, VFW Post 27, Department of Europe Inspector General 2023-2024. In recognition of his outstanding dedication and service as Inspector General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, his diligent efforts and oversight have filled a crucial role in maintaining the integrity and excellence of the organization.

His commitment and contributions over the past 31 years have been instrumental in supporting the mission, and his service as Inspector General exemplifies his unwavering devotion to our cause and the welfare of our members, justly earning him the deepest appreciation 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 31st day of July 2024, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant

General.

INSPECTOR GENERAL MASCETTI: Thank you, Chief, for the appointment. For all the states I've visited this year, thank you for the hospitality, comradeship. I always say thank you for what you did in the past, thank you for what you're currently doing, and thank you what you're going to do in the future.

I hope to see everybody in Columbus, and don't forget, take the 102 train to Columbus. Thank you.

PRESENTATION: LEGION OF HONOR BRONZE MEDAL TO
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF DUANE SARMIENTO

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: At this time, we'll have a presentation by past National Chaplain Peter Hook to Commander-in-Chief Sarmiento.

PAST CHAPLAIN HOOK: The Chapel of Four Chaplains in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania is pleased to present the Legion of Honor Bronze Medallion Award to our Commander-in-Chief, Duane Sarmiento.

This award is given in honor of the four chaplains and their selfless heroic acts aboard the USAT Dorchester on February 3rd, 1943. Chief Sarmiento, your numerous acts of volunteerism, selfless service, it's a model to those of us who are in this great organization. Congratulations on receiving this award.

PRESENTATION/REMARKS: VFW DISTINGUISHED HISTORICAL AWARD TO LES HINES

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: The VFW Distinguished Historical Award recognizes VFW members or citizens for their contributions to 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 that history is important to our institutions above and beyond what others do. Our next guest has been exceeding these requirements for more than 40 years.

After his time in the Army and his deployment to Vietnam, Les Hines returned to his home in Des Moines, Iowa, but he never forgot those he served alongside in the 123rd Aviation Battalion of the Americal Division.

In the '80s, Les started gathering documents related to his service with the goal reaching his battle buddies. This would turn into a much larger and more meaningful project, leading him to document the service and sacrifice of countless veterans, and bringing closure to the families and loved ones of those who never made it home.

His efforts in collaborating with fellow veterans in his role as a Vietnam historian for the American -- Americal Division Veterans Association has allowed for the collection of numerous personal effects of the men and women deployed, creating a living memorial to those of the division and perpetuating of their memory.

I'm honored to present the 2024 VFW Distinguished Historical Award to VFW Life member, Comrade Les Hines.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Distinguished Historical Award and Citation awarded to Les Hines in spirited recognition and lasting appreciation of his dedication and continued efforts to preserve and honor the service and history of those who served with the Americal Division during the Vietnam War.

His research, thoroughness, and passion to document military history has helped to document and depict the service, bravery, and love these brave service members had for each other and the country and families they left to protect.

His passion and talent have helped to provide a clear record and insight into the service and sacrifice of these veterans and will help to ensure their lives in service live on for generations. His selfless dedication to preserving their memory and perpetuate the remembrance of these Vietnam veterans has justly earned him the utmost respect and admiration of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

In witness whereof, we have here and to set our hands in the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 31st day of July 2024, approved by the National Council Administration, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant General.

MR. HINES: I very much appreciate this award. Our association is for World War II veterans and Vietnam veterans and the Cold War era of veterans. I appreciate my wife here, and I'm sorry to say one of my friends that was going to be here in the entourage was a commander of a VFW Post in San Antonio.

He's having cancer surgery today or else he'd be here with us, so Preston Rogers (phonetic) is the one I want you to pray for today. I brought something. It's called a Jesus nut. For aviation-types in Vietnam, we knew all about the Jesus nut.

You might have heard of it. It's -- it goes on a Huey helicopter, and it holds the main rotor on. So it -- it's something that holds things together, and it's got to be very strong because the rotor blades are 48 feet long, and they spin at -- the tips are near the sound barrier.

And it also is uplifting as on the helicopter, and I brought this to give to Commander Lipphardt today. He was a member of our Americal Division, and this is to symbolize strength, holding the team together, and being uplifting. So with that, I'm going to give this to Commander Lipphardt.

PRESENTATION/REMARKS: VFW DISTINGUISHED EDUCATIONAL AWARD TO LORA VOGT

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Our next guest shares in the VFW's commitment to educating America's youth on our great nation's history. She is an impactful educator in the classroom, and an accomplished and well-respected authority on the war that changed the course of history for the entire world, the Great War, World War I.

Since 2011, Lora Vogt has worked tirelessly in her roles at the National World War I Museum and Memorial, leading a charge to educate our youth and fellow Americans, reaching more than 20 million learner engagements through the program she's developed at the museum and online, a number that only continues to grow now.

Her knowledge, insight, and reputation as a knowledgeable and trusted authority on the war has landed her multiple speaking engagements across the nation and around the world.

The VFW Distinguished Educational Award is designed to recognize citizens or VFW members for an exceptional contribution to the education of this intrinsic value of American freedom and citizenship.

So today we are pleased to recognize Lora for her unwavering dedication to education and inspiring the future leaders of tomorrow to preserve American freedoms and demonstrate civic responsibility. It is now my privilege to present the 2024 Distinguished Educational Award to Lora Vogt.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Distinguished Educational Award and Citation awarded to Lora Vogt in special recognition and sincere appreciation of her exceptional commitment and dedication to educating our nation's youth and fellow citizens on the intrinsic values of American freedom and citizenship through the historical lens of World War I and its lasting impacts on our great nation.

Her distinguished and innovative teaching methods, whether in the classroom, among digital platforms, or on conference stages worldwide, work to instill a strong sense of patriotism while educating our nation's youth and fellow citizens, serving to strengthen and bolster our democracy for all future generations.

For this she has justly earned the highest degree of admiration and gratitude 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 31st day of July 2024, approved by the National Council Administration, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant General.

MS. VOGT: Friends, Kansas City is the home of many great things, and it is an honor and a pleasure to be able to educate for and about the war that changed America. It set the stage for the modern American military, and on the base of the great frieze at the

National World War I Museum and Memorial, we have these words: "Do all that we can to ensure a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

When we look at that tower, the guardian spirits of courage, honor, patriotism, and sacrifice, it is easy to be inspired to talk to youth, to share about the history of that timeframe.

But friends, it is also what you-all are doing in each of your cities, in each of your Posts, in each of your states that inspires individuals to continue to learn about this war, to continue to serve, continue to engage, to continue to meet the vision that those over 100 years ago wanted for us when this memorial was built.

It is an honor to receive this award. It is an honor to be here with you-all. It is an honor for over a decade of my time with the museum and memorial to have partnered with so many VFW Posts and the leadership that is there. It truly is an honor.

Thank you for this wonderful award.

Thank you for the ways that you continue to teach about the generations that went before us, and thank you for the way that you continue to inspire our future in those wonderful, meaningful, necessary things to make the world safe for democracy.

PRESENTATION/REMARKS: VFW DISTINGUISHED FRATERNAL AWARD TO CAROL THOMAS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: The VFW Distinguished Fraternal Award is designed to recognize VFW members or citizens who have furthered the aims or ideas of VFW camaraderie.

Nominees display a consistent efforts to preserve and strengthen a spirit of good friendship and loyalty among

VFW members, assisting the surviving spouses and dependents of deceased members while also providing assistance to vulnerable and at-risk comrades above and beyond what others would do.

Relying on her time in the U.S. Navy and her more than two decades as a correctional officer, VFW Life member Carol Thomas believes in the power of rehabilitation, and her tireless support of some of our most vulnerable veterans has culminated in the muster of the first ever VFW Post at a correctional facility.

Her dedication as -- to this too often forgotten and written off group of Veterans ensures they receive the camaraderie, sense of purpose, and support they deserve, often helping to increase their journey to a successful transition back to the civilian world. Her work is truly invaluable.

Her instituting of VFW 12226 at the Sterling Correctional Facility brings together both VFW eligible inmates and facility employees and has truly made an impressive impact on this community of veterans. It's a living example of walking the walk for veterans.

Today it brings me great pleasure to present the 2024 VFW Distinguished Fraternal Award to VFW Life member Carol Thomas.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Distinguished Fraternal Award and Citation awarded to Carol Thomas in spirited recognition and lasting appreciation of her unwavering commitment to supporting incarcerated and at-risk veterans at Sterling Correctional Facility.

As a U.S. Navy veteran, and with more than 20 years of experience as a correctional officer, the insightful assistance she is able to provide to this vulnerable Veteran population is truly invaluable.

Her dedication to rehabilitation and her work to ensure these veterans receive the camaraderie, structure, and sense of purpose they deserve to help ease their latest transition back to civilian life is inspiring. Further, her realized ideal in mustering VFW Post 12226 in the facility, bringing much needed support directly to veterans no matter where they may be, is in keeping with the highest values of the VFW and has justly earned her the deepest respect and utmost appreciation 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 31st day of July 2024, approved by the National Council of Administration, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant General.

MS. THOMAS: Sorry. I'm short, so -- brothers and sisters, comrades, I am very honored to receive this award today, but it wouldn't be possible for the assistance from chief and his staff, State of Colorado, my family, my friends, and also the '24- '25 Tribe.

And I am very humble, and I appreciate everybody's assistance in this, because we are bringing all veterans back to the forefront. Thank you.

PRESENTATION/REMARKS: 57 CONSECUTIVE YEARS OF MEMBERSHIP GROWTH CITATION
TO DEPARTMENT OF ARIZONA

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Now, look. If you've been coming to National Conventions for the last couple, five, ten, 15, 20 or 56 years, our next presentation comes as no surprise.

For now, 57 consecutive years, the members of the Department of Arizona have come together as a team to increase the VFW membership in their state. This is a remarkable feat.

I commend every member of the Department of Arizona for their many, many years of obtaining 100 percent or more in membership.

Now, I told the Department of Arizona last year, Bill -- Bill's, like -- you know, the goal was 102. I'm not sure in the last 56 years that's ever been the goal. I said, "Bill" -- he goes, "What if we hit 100 percent? Do we still get our plaque?" I said, "You ain't getting shit. The goal 102."

Arizona came through like champs, became All-American, got over 102 percent, and met the challenge. In honor of their hard work and dedication, I would like to call on William "Bill" Schaeffler, past Department Commander of Arizona, to accept this consecutive years of membership growth citation. Congratulations to everyone in the Department of Arizona.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Certificate of Commendation awarded to Department of Arizona in recognition of the remarkable achievement of 57 consecutive years of membership sustained by a Department of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

In witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hands in the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 31st day of July 2024, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant General.

COMMANDER SCHAEFFLER: So it's seriously been

a really hell of a year this year. Thank you, Arizona. Please sit down. Thank you so much.

They know -- they've been told multiple times I would not be standing here without them. As far as this year, first of all, this year started with me having to do a little about 147-mile round trip, because someone's wife confused her luggage.

A trip which national still hasn't reimbursed me for, which took two hours.

But hey, whatever.

You know, 147 miles at Mach 12.

Anyway, June 2nd of this year, Department of Arizona suffered a devastating day. If you're out there and you're hurting, and you're thinking about hurting yourself or others, you need to use that hole under your nose and let us know about it.

We can't read your mind. I've had my own issues. I've had a phone in one hand and a gun in the other, and I've had to make that phone call. My buddy knew that. We talked about it two days before this incident.

I'm sorry, Chief. You gave me the mic. You need to give me a minute. We talked about this.

And yet he chose to do this at our convention, and like I said, the entire Department's life changed in that moment. If you're hurt, and as I said, please reach out. Let us know. You're not alone. I'm infantry. Follow me.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Good words. But getting it back on now, the goal was 102 this year, as well, under Chief Lipphardt. So Al, if they don't get 102, say they come in 101.9, what do they get? They get shit.

I think that's what he said, so you know the goal for -- and I know Arizona's going to make it again at 102, even with the dry heat, Gene (phonetic), even with the dry heat.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: JASON ARNOLD TMAC INVESTMENTS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: This year, we reached a milestone. \$13 million in scholarships provided to America's student veterans through our VFW Sport Clips Help a Hero Scholarship program.

Yes. Yes. Can I get a clap? That's \$13 million.

Jesus.

Let me tell you, if I had 13 million in my pocket, I'd be clapping.

We absolutely wouldn't have been able to accomplish this without the devout friendship and generous support of the entire Sport Clips haircut team.

Our next speaker spent four and a half years in the Navy, enlisting right out at high school. Liberty (Inaudible)

Hey, Jason. Now, look. If you've been here, the goofy Army with the "hooah," then you got the Marines going "oorah." You got the air force yelling per diem. You know what Navy yells? Liberty call, liberty call.

Jason Arnold -- Jason Arnold and his family have been a part of the Sport Clips system for 15 years, and Jason, representing TMAC Investments, operates 19 Sport Clips stores in Colorado and Wyoming.

In addition to his support in our annual in-store fundraiser, he introduced the annual Help a Hero Castle Rock Classic golf tournament, now in its seventh year, and has raised approximately \$350,000 for this vital assistance program.

We are pleased he is able to join us today. Please give a warm welcome to a true supporter of America's student veterans, Jason Arnold.

MR. ARNOLD: Wow. Pretty amazing to be up here in front of all you guys, true heroes, so I appreciate this opportunity.

We are a family-owned business, TMAC Investments, includes myself, my wife down here in the front, her mom and dad, Ted and Tina, my brother-in-law, Riley, and his wife, Jessica.

And we are truly blessed to be a part of the Sport Clips organization where we celebrate heart of a champion by doing what's right, doing our best and treating others the way they want to be treated.

Just a little bit of flip on that golden rule, rather than treating the people the way we want to be treated, we actually put ourself in their shoes and think about how they want to be treated, so it's pretty special.

Ashley (phonetic) and I are honored, like I said, to be here on this stage for the convention of America's number one veteran support organization, truly amazing, so thank you. And I get the privilege to kind of discuss our VFW Sport Clips partnership. It's been -- it's been going on for almost about 30 years, so it's pretty amazing to be a part of that.

Sport Clips first started the partnership with VFW back in 1996 with Operation Uplink, and it was this program that got our manager, and ultimately our family, truly fired up about supporting our veterans.

The story goes, our manager, who wasn't a manager at the time, she was a stylist, but she received a phone call just out of the blue from her brother that was stationed overseas. And he called to say thank you for the calling

card he'd received from his Sergeant, which had the VFW logo and the Sport Clips logo, which is where she worked.

He wouldn't have been able to make that phone call if it wasn't for that calling card and that support and that partnership. But as the Internet became more available, calling cards became obsolete.

I don't think I've ever seen one for the past 20 years. But our founder, Gordon Logan, an Air Force veteran saw the growing need for higher education assistance as our veterans were coming home.

So was born in 2013 the Sport Clips VFW Help a Hero Scholarship fund, a fund where, as Chief said, over 2,900 scholarships and \$13 million have been awarded to date.

Those numbers are made possible by the fundraising efforts of over 1,850 locations nationwide. Donations are accepted one month before Veterans Day and our family and other locations also donate \$2 for every haircut made on that day.

And hopefully you know, on Veterans Day, free haircut for veterans, so please stop by and get your free haircut. But we're pretty proud that for six years running our Castle Rock location has been in the Heroes Club.

That's the top five fundraisers in the nation, so it's a great trend that we got going on that we're excited to continue with, the seventh year of the Castle Rock Classic and continued support for multiple stores in the front range of Colorado.

If you would like to talk offline about how you can get involved, I'll be here afterwards out front. But ultimately, this program is about our veterans, so please make sure that your Posts are aware of this program and are utilizing it. So thank you for your time.

Truly appreciate being up here on America's greatest stage, so thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: You know, while Jason was talking, I turned around, I saw Paul Herrera. Paul Herrera is up here. Good to see you, Paul, give him a round of applause.

That's an inside joke with me and Paul.

PRESENTATION: CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION
TO VFW POST 5579-NEW JERSEY

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Anthony T. Calista, VFW Post 5579 in Gibbstown, New Jersey has been my -- who wrote this -- my home away from home -- my wife is shaking her head going, yeah -- my home away from home since 1990. Somebody knew me.

Named after Gibbstown's first casualty of World War II and with more than 300 members Post 5579 puts the serve in service to our nation's military and veteran families and remains focused on giving back to its local community.

When I came to my brothers and sisters in arms with a wild idea of one day running for Commander-in-Chief, I had their full support and encouragement after they laughed. They showed me what it means to be a true and active member in our -- of our great organization and given me a kick in the ass when I needed it.

My fellow Post members have kept me grounded, focused, and humble, mostly.

I was proud to represent VFW 5579 and everything we achieved this year, and I'm proud to present the Anthony T. Calista Post 5579 from the great State of New Jersey and the best town of Gibbstown with their Certificate of Appreciation. Here to accept this citation, please welcome to the stage Post 5579 Junior Vice Commander Dave Young.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Certificate of Appreciation presented to Anthony T. Calista VFW Post 5579, Department of New Jersey. In outstanding recognition of its support and dedication to the VFW Commander-in-Chief during the 2023-2024 membership year.

Its unwavering commitment to the Chief's success played an integral role in ensuring the achievements of the entire organization. Its steadfast encouragement and devotion exemplify the very best of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post and has justly earned it the utmost appreciation of the organization.

In witness whereof, we have here unto set our hands in the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 31st day of July 2024, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant General.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: At this time, if you are nominating for elections, please make your way to the stage. If you are making nominations, please make your way to the stage.

PRESENTATION: CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION
TO VFW DEPARTMENT OF NEW JERSEY

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: When I joined the VFW almost 35 years ago, I had no idea of the exciting and challenging journey this would be. The VFW Department of New Jersey and every single member of our

great state has been next to me every step of the way.

You've been there to support me, guide me, and encourage me. I wouldn't be the person I am today without your unwavering support, and I -- truly I want to thank you for that. I was honored to represent you as VFW National Commander, and I hope you saw me stay true to who I am and where I came from.

The words thank you just don't seem enough, so today it is my honor to present the VFW Department of New Jersey with a Certificate of Appreciation.

I can't thank you enough for your support, and, I think more importantly, your friendship over the last three decades. Please give a big round of applause to the VFW Department of New Jersey 2425 Commander Luddie Austin, who is here to accept this citation on behalf of the Department.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Certificate of Appreciation presented to Department of New Jersey in grateful recognition of its support and dedication, which has significantly contributed to the successes of the VFW Commander-in-Chief during the 2023-2024 membership year.

Its unwavering commitment and efforts to further in the Chief's mission exemplify the very best of a Department of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. The positive impact of its support and contributions is deeply appreciated and serves as an inspiration to all of us.

In witness whereof, we have here unto set our hands in the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 31st day of July 2024, signed by Duane Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant General.

PRESENTATION: 2023-2024 DEPARTMENT COMMANDERS GIFT
TO COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF DUANE SARMIENTO

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: The 2023-2024 Department Commanders are now gathering here on the stage for a special presentation. Past Department of New Mexico Commander Victoria Haddox, past Department of New Jersey Commander Jeff Walding, and past Department of Georgia Commander Patsey Schreiber are the representatives.

AUDIENCE: Woo.

COMRADE SCHREIBER: Good morning.

First, I would like to recognize our Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento, who is totally out of woos. Our past Commander-in-Chiefs, our National Council members, and our amazing class of 2023-2024, thank you so much for allowing me to be your leader for the past four years.

When Duane decided his motto was going to be "Meet the challenge," he asked us, "Is that okay?" In his new Jersey accent, "Is that going to be effing okay?"

Yeah. Duane, that's effing okay. Yes, you did. And Duane always said, "I'm just a bus driver. You guys got to be my students on the bus." Sometimes I think it was a short bus. I really do.

Our class did have some issues, I'm not going to lie. Sometimes we didn't love each other. Sometimes we didn't even like each other, but we made it work, and you could tell that by all of the white hats you see behind me.

This was an amazing group.

I was so honored to be a part of it. It's my pleasure to introduce two other people that have gifts for Duane before we give him his final gift.

First, it will be Heath (phonetic). Heath come on up for me, my friend and my comrade.

COMRADE SILCOX: All right. So a year ago, remember the dry heat? Dry heat? Thanks, Arizona.

So if you don't know our National President, she's from Utah, so I built her something for her -- for her year. So all of a sudden I get home, and I start getting phone calls and phone calls and phone calls.

And I'm like, whoa, what's going on? I guess Duane wasn't very happy he didn't get one, so I had to make a coin holder for Duane. So it's in the shape of New Jersey, if you haven't figured this out, but the Utah one was in Utah. So we made sure we got him one.

Sorry, Duane. It does not fit all 50 coins. I couldn't get it big enough.

COMRADE SCHREIBER: And now we're going to have Duane's counterpart and golfing buddy. They always seem to win. I'm not going to say they cheat. They're the only ones that carry a pencil with an eraser. You decide. Jeff come on up.

COMRADE WALDING: Well, all I know is I have the Super Bowl ring from the Dominican to prove who won. So going back, I mean, if you look back ten years ago and Duane -- I know Duane probably uses this while he tours and talks.

But who would have thought he was going to be the National Commander? Who would have thought I would be the State Commander? The duo goes back a long time, a long time of antics.

But, you know, I'm proud to be up here to show our support for the National Commander-in-Chief. And somehow, in some weird twist of fate, I'm the Department Commander, and he's the National Commander at the same time.

And I didn't -- I couldn't have picked a better chief than Duane. So on behalf of the entire class -- if you can't figure out -- not a midget hopping out here.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Oh, I know.

PAST COMMANDER WALDING: Oh, shit. Show everybody else. Oh, shit.

AUDIENCE: Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Don't let Garduno see that, because I guarantee you guys get to go to the Quartermaster General role. Don't look at this.

COMRADE WALDING: It was licensed on the New Jersey Boardwalk.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: For those golfers -- wow. It's a -- it's the latest TaylorMade Qi irons.

Wow. Thank you. Thank you so much.

AUDIENCE: Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Well, I surely hope this Scotty Cameron putter helps my putting.

Thank you.

COMRADE SCHREIBER: Okay. Stay right here.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: For everybody here, thank you. Thank you so much.

COMRADE SCHREIBER: Stay right here, Duane. We have one more. We have one more.

Most of you know, I am a quilter by trade, and I wanted to do something special to remember your year. So I made your quilt, at the 100-plus hours of labor, your commander's quilt is behind you.

In the top corner of the left is Duane's "Meet The Challenge" insignia. In the top right corner is his leadership team. In the bottom left corner is his Commander-in-Chief's patch.

And I would be remiss if I didn't have Mark Short, my comrade, who tragically took his own life the night before he was being sworn in as one of our state Commanders, so it did my heart good to make this.

So thank you so much, Duane for your years of leadership, your friendship, and your support. I cannot thank you enough.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I feel like Dave Brown. Please. Please. Thank you.

If you don't mind, I don't want to put my back to you, but I want to address the class, if you don't mind. It's truly my honor to be your Commander-in-Chief.

I couldn't wish for a better team. The only difference between me and you is my hat says something different on it. You busted your ass all year long. We fought hard. We played hard, and I don't know what to say.

I just want to say thank you from the bottom of my heart. You know, we -- it's lifetime friendship. Lifetime friendships. I don't even know what to say. I don't. All right.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Other than -- other than nomination of officers, is there any other business to come before this convention?

Any other business? Any other business?

Hearing none, I'll call the Adjutant General to make any announcements he may have.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Comrades, the only announcements I have are the traditional one you've heard by your platoon Sergeants many times. Do not add to or subtract from the population. If you are arrested, establish dominance quickly.

NOMINATIONS: NATIONAL OFFICERS

NOMINATION: COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We will now proceed with the nomination of the '24-'25 National Officers. I will open a nomination for the Office of Commander-in-Chief. Is there any nominations for Commander-in-Chief?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ROESCH: I am honored today to place the name of Alfred "Al, The Real Deal" Lipphardt before you for the position of Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

To borrow a few words from a great past Commander-in-Chief John Gwizdak, who was a mentor to both Al and myself, "Leaders are like eagles. They do not fly with the flock.

A true leader has confidence to stand alone, and the courage to make the tough decisions, and the compassion to listen to the needs of others. He does not set out to be a leader but becomes one by quality of his actions

and integrity of his intent.

Leaders are much like eagles. They do not flock. You find them one at a time."

There is no doubt that Al Lipphardt is a leader.

He served in the United States Army from 1965 to 1979, earning his VFW eligibility by serving in Vietnam from 1967 to '68 and again in 1970 to '71.

In recognition of his service, he received the Combat Infantryman Badge, the Bronze Star with V Device, the Bronze Star Medal for Meritorious Service, the Purple Heart Medal, the Vietnam Campaign Medal with Silver Star and two Bronze Stars, among many others.

As I said, Al Lipphardt is the real deal.

Al joined the VFW in 2002 at Post 12002 in North Fulton, Georgia, where he maintains his Gold Legacy Life membership. He served in pretty much every elected and appointed position at the Post, District, and Department levels, culminating in his election to the VFW Department of Georgia Commander position 2014, 2015, in which he achieved the Triple Crown All-American Commander status.

At the national level he has served on numerous committees as well as the Council of Administration.

He received his Bachelor of Science degree in business administration from Pacific Western University in 1990. He is a member of the Rotary Club of Stone Mountain, Georgia, the American Legion, Life member of the DAV, Military Order of the Purple Heart, VA National Home, Military Order of the Cootie, the 196th Light Infantry Brigade, an inductee to the United States Army Officers Candidate School Alumni Association Hall of Fame.

Al is currently retired. Al and his wife Carol were married on February 24th, 1967, and they reside in Stone Mountain, Georgia. Comrades, it gives me great honor to nominate Al "The Real Deal" Lipphardt for Commander-in-Chief of Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: In case you didn't know, I failed to recognize though who is nominating. That was the past Commander-in-Chief Hal Roesch, just in case you didn't know. Is there any seconds? I recognize National Council member Georgia, Jeff Carroll.

COMRADE CAROLL: I met Al about 20 years ago at our state convention.

It was my first state convention, and you know how it is when you go to your first state convention. You don't know many people other than the Post members, maybe some members of your District. But I sat down at a table with a guy I didn't know, and we started talking.

That man was Al Lipphardt.

He was a comrade then, and I can tell you that, regardless of what position he holds in the VFW, he's a comrade today. I was impressed then by his enthusiasm, his energy, and his unapologetic love of our country and the VFW.

I've watched Al move up through the ranks of the VFW, and it has always been clear to me that Al Lipphardt is a leader, a man of his word, and a warrior. And you will never hear Al say, but we've always done it that way.

Anyone who has heard him speak knows that Al is the comrade for this job, and that is why I enthusiastically and unapologetically second the nomination for Al Lipphardt for Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Are there any other nominations for Commander-in-Chief?

NOMINATION: SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Hearing none, I will now open a nomination for the Office of Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief. Are there nominations for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief? Podium recognizes past Commander-in-Chief Bill Thien, VFW Post 3281 in Indiana.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Chief. Appreciate it.

It's my honor to introduce to you a candidate running for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief who exemplifies what the VFW stands for.

Carol Whitmore spent a total of 36 years in the U.S. Army, both active duty and the Reserves. She retired as a First Sergeant EA. Carol earned her eligibility into the VFW from her deployment to Iraq with a 103rd Expeditionary Sustainment Command.

She joined VFW Post 9127 in Des Moines, Iowa, where she maintains her Gold Legacy Life membership. Carol served in various elected and appointed positions at all levels of the VFW, culminating with her election as Department Commander in 2018, in which she and her Department achieved All-American status.

On the national level she served on the Legislative Committee for three years and on the General Resolutions Committee. Carol was elected to a four-year term on the VFWs National Council of Administration by her State of Iowa

in June of 2019. Carol served on the National Finance Committee as a Council member.

In recognition to her military service, she relieved -- she received the Legion Merit Medal, Bronze Star Medal, six Army Accommodation Medals, Army Achievement Medal, four Good Conduct Medals, National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Medal, and a Combat Action Badge, among others.

Carol attended the University of Northern Iowa and Hawkeye Community College.

She is a retired nurse. She's a member of the Military Order of the Cootie and a life member of the American Legion. Carol and her husband, Brad, also a life member of the VFW resides in Des Moines, Iowa.

It is a pleasure and an honor to place the name of Carol Whitmore for your consideration for the high Office of Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars United States. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Do we have any seconds? I recognize Gundy Metz, VFW Post 1318 Wisconsin past Department Commander.

COMRADE METZ: Good morning. Hopefully I can carry my voice.

It is my distinct honor to second the nomination for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief of my sister from another mister, Carol Whitmore.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Are there any other nominations for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief?

NOMINATION: JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF: Hearing none, I will now open the nomination for the Office of Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief. Is there any nomination for Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief? Chair recognizes Vincent "BJ" Lawrence, past Commander-in-Chief VFW Post 7686 in New Mexico.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Good morning comrades, I'm honored this morning to stand before you to offer the nomination of a United States Air Force retiree from the great State of Montana, Timothy Peters.

Tim has served this organization for approximately 27 years. Tim has the full support and love of his wife and family behind him as he pursues his quest to join team Lipphardt and Whitmore.

Tim has served in a myriad of positions in our great organization.

To name a few, he has served on the National Council of Administration. Tim has served two past Commanders-in-Chiefs as National Budget Chairman. Most recently, a few short weeks ago, Tim retired from the Department of Montana after 13 years of honorable and fiscally sound service as the Department Adjutant Quartermaster.

Comrades, that service has proven that Tim has an acute attention to detail as it pertains to fiscal duties and responsibilities. Today, I ask that you join me in support and consideration to elect Timothy Peters as your next Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Are there any seconds? Chair recognizes Tom Pouliot, past Commander-in-Chief, VFW Post 10010, Montana.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF POULIOT: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief, National Officers, Delegates to this National Convention, and my fellow comrades.

I have the distinct pleasure and honor to stand before this delegation of this great organization and second the nomination of Tim Peters for the Office of National Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief.

With the unanimous endorsement of the Western conference, his Department of Montana, and, as has been stated, his wife, Barb, we brought to you, as promised, a sincere and energetic leader for the VFW.

In Tim Peters, we have delivered. Over the years the VFW has got to know and respect Tim in the various appointments and elective offices that he has held. It's been mentioned that he's been twice Chairman of the National Budget, he's been Western Conference Secretary, a National Council member, and a member of numerous national committees.

Through these elections and appointments, he has acquired the knowledge and experience that will assist him in serving as our National Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief.

Tim works hard. I almost think he's a workaholic, but he's chosen the VFW to be his work. And we in Montana are so happy that he chose the VFW to be his work because when he came to us as our Department Quartermaster, the state had thousands in debt and no money in the bank.

Tim set to work, and soon we're on a sound financial footing. Working hard until you get the job done, that's what Tim does. He brought Montana out of the red into the black. VFW recognizes this kind of leadership with the All-American status, and so of course, Tim has been an All-American Department Quartermaster, District Quartermaster, and All-American Post Quartermaster.

Tim is a leader in recruiting also, and he leads there by example. He's a certified national recruiter, has

distinguished himself as an elite recruiter, and has been Century Recruiter six times. He works those recruiting tables because he has the heart and passion for the VFW.

This passion has caused Tim to give much of his time, aid, and assistance to veterans and their families. He sets the bar for what it is to be a hardworking member. His work helping veterans and their families attracted others to work with them.

Before long, Tim had a team of people working with him, getting things done. At every stage, Tim set the goals, and working together, the team reached or exceeded those goals. And that's why Montana has been an All-American Department seven out of the last ten years.

This work, again, shows what it is to be a leader by example. Tim didn't take credit for these successes to himself. He credits his teams, and this is leadership. And of course, he has earned the All-American Department Commander Award.

Tim has shown that he's not afraid to challenge any issue that he feels is not in the best interest of the VFW. He has a proactive approach to solving problems, which leads to quicker, more focused solutions. Where others see only difficulties, he sees possibilities, and Tim sees great possibilities in the future of the VFW.

So it is without reservation, with great pride that I second the nomination of a man most qualified to be our next Junior Vice Commander-in-chief, Tim Peters.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you, Tom. Are there any other nominations for Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief?

NOMINATION: QUARTERMASTER GENERAL

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Hearing none, I will now open the nominations for the Office of Quartermaster General.

Is there any nominations for Quartermaster General? Chair recognizes Hal Roesch, past Commander-in-Chief, Delegate, VFW Post 3219, Department of Virginia.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ROESCH: My friend, Marc Garduno, was elected Quartermaster General of Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States July 21st, 2022. Marc hit the ground running day one, and he hadn't stopped.

He quickly implemented a new credit card program intended to gain efficiencies in the purchasing process, while at the same time gaining a new revenue stream from the use of those credit cards.

Marc has processed and dispersed over \$14.4 million in life membership dues and over 8 million in annual dues to all levels of this organization. And yes, that includes you-all's Posts.

One of Marc's duties is to oversee – oversee the VFW store, which generated over \$234,000 in rebates back to the Departments and Auxiliaries. That was an increase of over 15 percent from last year. They processed 621 custom orders for the Post and Departments totaling \$519,000.

They developed, designed, and procured 25 new products commemorating the VFW's 125th anniversary. Marc supervised the foundation search for a new financial auditing firm and ultimately found one that they liked and hired them to be the VFW's financial auditing firm, saving us about \$100,000.

Comrades, the last two years, Marc Garduno has proved himself time and time again. He is without a doubt the right man for the right job.

It is truly my honor and privilege to place before you the nomination of Marc Garduno for the position of Quartermaster General, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States of America.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Is there a second? The chair recognizes Victor "I got more Bravo Zulus than Greg Stafford ever will" Materno.

COMRADE MATERNO: Comrades, ladies and gentlemen, and honored guests, it is my privilege to stand before you and second the nomination of a remarkable leader, Marc Garduno, for Quartermaster General. Marc embodies the spirit and selflessness of service that defines the VFW.

His journey began on the battlefield, where he wore the uniform of the U.S. Army for 20 years. As a Chief Warrant Officer 3 specializing in human resources, he served with unwavering dedication in ensuring the welfare of his fellow soldiers, but Marc's commitment extended beyond the military.

In 2005, he joined VFW Post 8180 in Seoul, South Korea, initiating a passion for advocacy and comradeship.

His leadership skills shone brightly, earning him the title of Triple Crown American Commander and leading a VFW outstanding community service Post in 2016.

Today we celebrate Marc's impressive resume the first Mexican American to ascend to the position of Quartermaster General in the VFW 125 years. His election is a testament to the organization's commitment to

diversity, inclusion, and recognizing excellence regardless of background.

In his nomination speech last convention, Marc expressed his enthusiasm and honor for this -- for his role. He said, "I'm so thrilled and honored to be in this position. I'm going to do my best to support the awesome professionals and outstanding comrades and volunteers to make up this VFW."

His words resonate with purpose and determination. Marc's pursuit of education reflects his commitment to lifelong learning. He holds a Master of Science degree in Nonprofit Management from Wilmington University, class of 2021, a Bachelor of Science of Organizational Management, and an associate's degree in applied science from Fayetteville Tech. His academic achievements mirror his dedication to excellence.

As Quartermaster General, Marc will continue to safeguard the VFW legacy, assuming that our veterans receive the support they deserve. His leadership will inspire generations to come, reminding us that service transcends borders and backgrounds.

In closing, let me say that Marc and I are not only friends and fellow comrades, I'll be serving as the incoming budget chair for '24-'25, which mean -- which means I have had a different perspective than most on how he has performed and served our organization.

Let us rally behind Marc Garduno, our trailblazer, our advocate, and our Quartermaster General. May his tenure continue to be marked by compassion, innovation, and unwavering commitment to our veterans. Comrade Garduno, we salute you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you. Are there any other nominations for Quartermaster General?

NOMINATION: NATIONAL CHAPLAIN

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Hearing none, I will now open nominations for the Office of Chaplain. Is there any nomination for the Office of Chaplain? We recognize Benjamin Mastridge, Sr., past Department Commander of Department of Pennsylvania, VFW Post 6495 in Pennsylvania.

COMRADE MASTRIDGE: Good morning. I bring you greetings from the great State of Pennsylvania and our esteemed new commander, Barbara Loncar.

I was -- this morning, I am here to nominate Peter R. Hook for the high Office of National Chaplain for the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

His military service, he earned his certification for the VFW. He was drafted in the Army in 1966. He attended OCS Infantry School in Fort Benning, Georgia. He served with the 1st Infantry Division in Vietnam in 1967 and 1968. We all know, as Vietnam veterans, '68 was a hell of a year for Tet.

When he was done with his -- oh, I'm sorry. He also received a Bronze Star and two Air Medals for his service in Vietnam. His experience -- he was ordained in 1978. He's the Chaplain of Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas -- in Dallas, Texas, for six years.

He's a church pastor, a church consultant, and a church speaker. He served as District 8 and Yardley, Lower Makefield Post 6393 Chaplain. He presides over the Post Chaplain of Marysville [sic] Memorial Post, VFW Post 6076.

A native of Meyersville, Pennsylvania, Peter has also called Indiana and Texas his home. For the last 40 years has resided in Langhorne, Pennsylvania.

He received his Bachelor of Science degree from the Lancaster Bible School and earned his four-year master's theological degree from the Dallas Technological [sic] Seminary. He has also studied at Grace Theological Seminary in Indiana and, believe it or not, in Jerusalem University in Israel.

Peter has served as a pastor, a church consultant, and an intern pastor of the members of his church. In addition to his pastoral ministry, Peter has -- part of his -- oh. Peter has been part of the facility of the Philadelphia Bible University, now Cairn University, for the past 29 years and is national instructor for the Walkthrough Bible Ministry.

He is a Gold Legacy Life member of Meyersville Memorial, VFW Post 6076. Since 2010, Reverend Hook has served as the state Chaplain for the Department of Pennsylvania for the Veterans of Foreign War, and in 2014, he was elected Eastern States Chaplain.

Then in 2016, he was elected National Chaplain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Peter has been married to his lovely wife, Caroline, for 40 -- for 54 years. Caroline taught English and writing at Cairn University, serving as a -- as president of her Auxiliary for six years and has served at Department of Pennsylvania Auxiliary state museum -- I mean musician, for 2 -- at 2011. At the 124th National Convention in Phoenix, Arizona, she has a -- she was appointed National Auxiliary Musician.

Remember these words, integrity, commitment, and service. These are his priorities, integrity in all dealings with others, commitment to the VFW and its ideals and programs, service to all veterans.

He has been endorsed by his Post, 6076, in Marysville, PA, District 18, Cumberland County, Dauphin County, Lebanon Counties. He has also been endorsed by the C of A of the State of Pennsylvania. He has been endorsed by past Commanders Eiler, Getz, Mastridge, Fairchild, Canevari, Umberger, Fuhrman, Hanzes, Perry, Peters, Smith, and Manella.

He has also been endorsed by Theodore Bauer, past National Commander, past Eastern state commander, and past PA State Chaplain.

Peter's pledge to you, "In my role as VFW National Chaplain, I will continue to work with each of the conferences, Departments, Districts, and Post Chaplains, and function as a resource person and coach to each" -- "to each of them and to show them the responsibilities of ministry effectively to the Post members of their facilities."

He does not want a Chaplain to show up and tell three prayers and go home. He is that kind of man.

On a personal note, I have known Peter many, many years, and his -- anyhow, I was -- I've known Peter forever. I've nominated him in several things. You will never find a more dedicated man for this job. He loves veterans, he respects veterans, and he will work hard to make sure the Office of Chaplain throughout this great land will be respected and known for its goodness.

That being said, I am more than proud to nominate Peter R. Hook for the ensuing year of 2024 and 2025, for the high Office of National Chaplain for the Veterans of Foreign Wars. God Bless America.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Do we have a second? I recognize William "Doc" Schmitz, past Commander-in-Chief, Delegate, VFW Post 524, Department of New York.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: Pay attention.

Picture me doing this. I am a sinner. How in the hell this came about, I don't have a clue. But it did, so I'm here. As a member of this organization and a 32nd Degree Mason, I do believe in a god. God is good, and he's kept my butt on the right side of the grass for a long time. This guy has got character.

There's four religious people that have impressed me in my life. One was a Catholic priest who sent troubled youth to camp. I was one of the ones that went to camp. I never got to say thank you because I was a bit of a character.

The second one was a Chaplain that I met at the last month of 13 months in Vietnam. He was a Chaplain and first med. He dealt with death and dying day in and -- day and night, because we know, as combat son of a guns -- and I cleaned that up, Chaplain -- is there was a lot of -- you don't pick when you're kicking the bucket.

And that poor son of a gun was up at the middle of the night, 3:00 in the morning, and up aiding the men, trying to -- trying to keep people to stay alive or help them die.

The third is R.P. Kane, the Chaplain for the Department of New York, Purple Heart Army recipient from Vietnam. How he has the strength and the dedication to help people in that -- at that level, he's stronger than I am.

Then there's this other guy back here, the guy with the hook. I've watched him a lot, and these are my words. He's got his shit together, and he's one good son of a bitch.

It's not a -- the only thing he cares about the office is so he can get in that position so he can do good stuff to help people out, and I've seen it.

So if you've got an issue going on, I don't give a damn what it is, whether it's family stuff, personal stuff, you're just feeling downright stupid or down in the dumps, you can take this son of a gun aside and shoot the breeze with him.

And he's going to stick with you. He even promised to pray for me. The poor -- the poor guy has got his hands full trying to get me into heaven.

But I -- I -- I am honored -- this is one of the few big honors that I kind of like. I get to do this as a sinner. And God knows I -- I'm good at that, so if you need any advice on how to get in trouble, I can help you out. With that, I'm clear. Thank you for your time.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: And Reverend Hook worries about me talking. Are there any other nominations for Chaplain?

NOMINATION: NATIONAL JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Hearing none, I'll now open the nominations for the Office of Judge Advocate General. Is there any nominations for Judge Advocate General?

Oh. In case you don't know, Paul Herrera, past Department Commander, Department of Washington, VFW Post 2224, Delegate, department --

COMRADE HERRERA: Commander-in-Chief, National Officers, past Commanders-in-Chiefs, the fellow comrades, and Delegates of the 125th VFW National Convention, I have the honor today to talk about a friend and a

comrade, Joshua Schrek.

Joshua Schrek is an Iraq, Afghanistan veteran who served in the United States Navy and the U.S. Army. His academic achievements include a master in business administration and ongoing studies in industrial and organizational psychology.

With a background as a chief officer in business and a successful consulting owner, Joshua is renowned for his expertise in operations, human resources, and strategic planning.

Having held various VFW leadership roles at the Post, state, and national levels, Joshua's contributions are well known. As the current national parliamentarian, he has supported literally thousands of comrades through his guidance and assistance with his Facebook page, e-mails, and phone calls.

His expertise in parliamentary procedures and VFW institutional knowledge shows he knows processes, but more importantly, his integrity and unbiased judgment has been displayed in many important VFW meetings at the grassroots level and at the highest national levels.

Everybody in -- a lot of people in here know who Josh Schrek is, and some say that he is a VFW machine, but I would like to talk a little bit about his human side. Because, when you peel back the layers, you'll find a huge heart, a heart that loves veterans, their families, to include their children.

He also misses his two dogs who have recently journeyed to the other side. He has the support of his family at home, his wife Jennifer, and his young daughter Hannes, who never fails to call her dad when he achieves new heights in his VFW career.

He'll call and he -- she will call her dad and say, "I'm so proud of you, Dad."

So today I stand before all of you, asking for your support in electing Josh Schrek as your Judge Advocate General. Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I proudly placed a nomination in the name of Josh Schrek, from the great State of Washington, for Judge Advocate General. So be bold, be courageous, be VFW.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Do we have a second? Chair recognizes Drew James, Department Junior Vice Commander, Delegate, VFW Post 7511, Department of Washington.

COMRADE JAMES: I guess I got demoted, Chief?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: It's the little things, right? Death of 1,000 cuts.

Paper says junior vice commander. Drew is the senior vice commander for the Department of Washington.

COMRADE JAMES: Thank you, Chief.

Comrades, some tasks come easier than others. And it's with ease and pride that I perform this important task today. Comrade Joshua Schrek is exceptionally well qualified for this position.

As a -- as Comrade Herrera highlighted, Josh has deep roots in this organization and is sought out by comrades across the VFW. Often, when someone has a question about our organizational rules, the answer is simple. Contact Josh Schrek. This is a testament to his knowledge of our bylaws, manual of procedure, rituals, and Robert's Rules of Order.

I cannot think of a more well-rounded comrade to take on the esteemed role of Judge Advocate General. Josh embodies the dedication and excellence, and it is my honor and privilege to second the nomination for Joshua Schrek to serve as Judge Advocate General for the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Are there any other nominations for Judge Advocate General?

NOMINATION: NATIONAL SURGEON GENERAL

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Hearing none, I will now open the nominations for the Office of Surgeon General. Is there any nomination for Surgeon General? I recognize Clint Tuorila. Tuorila? Tuorila, right? Clint Tuorila, VFW Post 428, Department of Minnesota.

COMRADE TUORILA: Commander, National Officers, comrades, it is my distinct honor to stand before you today to nominate Dr. James R. Tuorila from the great State of Minnesota, for Surgeon General for the ensuing term.

Jim has served for 40 years as a professional psychologist, assisting veterans, connecting them to their benefits that they are due. I cannot tell you how many times through our travels I've had veterans approach me and say, it's because of Doc that I finally got the benefits that I deserved.

I'm at 100 percent. I'm not going to be homeless. I have the funds I need. I'm in a better place. I'm not contemplating suicide. So that is the kind of man that he is, a tireless advocate for veterans.

He served with distinction at the Post, District, Department, and even at the national level before. He's a graduate of Bemidji State University, go Beavers, from Minnesota, Wichita State, go Shockers, and also from Texas Tech, go Red Raiders.

I can't tell you how happy I am to be up here to nominate him for the ensuing term and how proud we are of

him in Minnesota. And I am so privileged and honored to call him my dad, Dr. James Tuorila, placing his name in a nomination for Surgeon General for the upcoming term. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Do we have a second? I recognize Dale Hoogeveen, past Department Commander, Department of Minnesota, Delegate, VFW Post 1791 in Department of Minnesota.

COMRADE HOOGEVEEN: Good morning, comrades.

You just heard a most heartfelt nomination of Dr. James Tuorila by his son and fellow life member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

I'm honored to stand before you to give you some additional insight into our comrade. Doc doesn't know this, but he was very influential in the decisions I made to pursue the opportunity to serve this organization at the Department level.

He was one of the first Department officers to engage me in conversation at the first Department event I'd attended a number of years ago. I don't know why he took the time to speak with me, and today, perhaps he wonders the same.

His professionalism, friendly demeanor, and the fact he seemed to know and address everyone in attendance by name impressed and inspired me. Dr. Tuorila is the only state surgeon I've known, a testament to the high regard the comrades of the Department of Minnesota have for him as he has served in that capacity for 14 years.

This will be his fourth tour as our Surgeon General, a testament to the high regard of the Big Ten Conference and you, the members of this outstanding organization, have for him.

Retiring after 20 years of service at the VA Hospital in St. Cloud, Minnesota, Doc continues to serve the veteran community in private practice, being sought out by veterans throughout the country. Bringing awareness to veterans, their families, and to the public regarding mental health and suicide prevention has been a top priority for Doc.

Serving others is his definition of success. I am most grateful for his mentorship and friendship.

Comrades, it is my true honor to second the nomination of Dr. James Tuorila for election to the esteemed Office of Surgeon General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Any other nominations for Surgeon General?

Hearing none -- before we get to you, Sergeant-at-Arms, let me -- put it down. Again, if I could -- if I could, after this session, real briefly see Dr. Ken, Jack Farrell, Mike Lutman, DPA Lauren, Bubba, Johnny Capps, Dave Young, and Mike Klein if they're in the -- in the audience.

And Greg -- I don't know if Stafford is here. If you could real fast afterwards.

CLOSING CEREMONIES

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I will now ask the Sergeant-at-Arms, please perform the closing ceremonies for today's business, please.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Yes, sir, Comrade Commander-in-Chief, sir.

Comrades, all rise. Comrade National Chaplain, would you lead us in our closing prayer?

Uncover parade hut.

CHAPLAIN FREI: Lord, keep us safe as we draw ever closer to the beginning of a new VFW year. In this last evening of convention, may we enjoy the food and drink of this good time together, may we find always ways to keep in touch with our new friends and comrades, and may those that leave convention today travel back safely to their homes. Amen.

AUDIENCE: Amen.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, ten-hut. Cover.

Comrades, facing the flag of our nation, please

join me in a final salute to our colors. Present hut. Order hut. Comrade Commander-in-Chief, that completes closing ceremonies of this session of the 125th National Convention of Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Liberty call, liberty call, liberty call for all Departments to expire here tomorrow at 0800.

(MEETING CONCLUDED AT 10:51 A.M.)

BUSINESS SESSION
THURSDAY, AUGUST 1, 2024

(The Business Session of the 125th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in the Louisville International Convention Center, Louisville, Kentucky, was called to order on Thursday, August 1, 2024, at 8:00 a.m., by Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento)

CALL TO ORDER
SALUTE TO COLORS
INVOCATION: NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DAVID FREI
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I will now reconvene the 125th VFW National Convention. Sergeant-at-Arms, you will please conduct the opening ceremonies.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Yes, sir, Comrade Commander-in-Chief, sir. Comrades, all rise.

Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, ten-hut. Comrades, facing the flag of our nation, please join me for an opening salute to our colors. Present hut. Order hut.

Comrade National Chaplain, you lead us in our opening prayer. Uncover parade hut.

CHAPLAIN FREI: Almighty God, today we formally complete our past year. Thank you for your assistance. We ask special blessings on each veteran and family member we are in contact with.

Lord, as we come to our new jobs, we recognize we are blessed by our families, 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 to serve the mission of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States of America. Amen.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, ten-hut. Cover.

Comrades, honoring the flag of our nation, please join me in our Pledge of Allegiance. Present, hut. I –

AUDIENCE: Pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Order hut. Comrade Commander-in-Chief, that completes the opening ceremony of this session of the 125th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Thank you, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you, Sergeant-at-Arms –

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: National Sergeants, right.

AUDIENCE: Woo.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Forward hut.

AUDIENCE: Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I got -- oh, what little I have left, I'm trying to save. Oh, please be seated. Where the hell is the gavel?

Dan, did you want to make announcement? Doing all your announcements? All right.

The Adjutant General has some announcements to make.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Morning, comrades. All newly elected Council members, please come to the front. We have reserved seating for you on the front row. You seasoned Council members, do not tickle their ears or mess with them while they're on the front row.

The Council of Administration meeting will happen one hour after the closing of the convention. That will happen in Ballroom A, B on the main floor. On your way out of the hall today, please see one of the Sergeants to receive an invitation to the Chief's and President's Reception.

There will be limited, while supplies last, heavy hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar.

This is not an all-you-can-eat buffet, so make dinner plans and bring some cash to pay for your own drinks. This will be held in Ballroom C, D, and E on the main level from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Comrades, we're going to ask that you please wait after retiring of the colors because today, we are modifying our closing by introducing a U.S. Navy custom of piping ashore a high-ranking official when they are departing.

Side boys, please come to this side, my left side, my left -- this -- over here when AI is done with his main speech, the big, long speech he's got. All right? Thank you very much, Commander-in-Chief.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: VFW NATIONAL AUXILIARY
PRESIDENT CARLA MARTINEZ

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I am extremely pleased that here to visit our convention today is the women -- women. I got enough problems. Look.

First of all, it says, "Woman," not, women. I said, women. That -- the last thing I need is more than one. I got enough problems with one.

It was a long night. Who the hell kept me in the hospitality room all night? Bastards.

I'm extremely pleased that here to visit our convention today is a woman with whom I have been proud to serve with over this past year -- you know, and that's really not the past year -- the last three years, while I was in the Chairs.

Carla Martinez 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 compatriot and outstanding leader.

Please welcome a wonderful woman from Layton, Utah, Carla Martinez, National President of VFW Auxiliary. I was waiting for you to walk in over there. I'm like -- it's all you.

AUXILIARY PRESIDENT MARTINEZ: Before I get started, is Adjutant Tony Dobbins in the room?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: He was AUXILIARY

AUXILIARY PRESIDENT MARTINEZ: Can you come to the stage for me, please?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: You're in trouble, Tony.

AUXILIARY PRESIDENT MARTINEZ: Never in trouble. While he's coming down, I'm going to tell you a story.

Between trying to burn Alabama down and visiting Georgia, I got food poisoning while in Alabama. I got to Georgia, and I couldn't do anything. I couldn't walk hardly. I couldn't stand, and Tony and his wife, who was the president, had me stay at their home for the two days that I was there.

I don't know anybody else in the world that would do that for almost a complete stranger, but they took me in and they took care of me. And I just want to show appreciation, so -- for the teamwork.

Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento, National VFW Officers, past Commander-in-Chiefs, and VFW members, I joined under the eligibility of my late father, Harry Creel, who served in the United States Air Force for 23 years and served in Vietnam.

I have been a member of the Auxiliary for almost 43 years. My husband is an SSBN sailor, and my son was in the Air Force as a Crew Chief. I myself retired from the Navy and earned my eligibility for the VFW through 13 months' stay in Korea and am a member of the VFW, that's Gold Legacy Life member, and Auxiliary Post 409.

I am so honored to be here as the national president for the VFW Auxiliary for the '23-'24 year, and I'm sad that my time is coming to an end. However, the things that have been accomplished this year have been beyond my wildest dreams. I was able to meet with all 50 states from August '23 through April '24.

I would like to give a shout-out to Georgia. I was able to have a front-row seat to Chief Sarmiento and his testimony at Capitol Hill. Wow. Giving the students their checks for winning in the Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen contest was unbelievable.

The friendships these kids make just in a few short days are impressive, and we could all learn from that.

Being able to have my Council Administration meeting on a cruise ship where more than 420 people from the VFW and Auxiliary attended the mid-year conference was amazing.

I was able to visit the Auxiliaries in Guam and the Philippines with my Chief-of-Staff, and we gave mentoring to both the Auxiliary and the VFW members so they would know how our programs work, which are similar to the VFW programs.

As the invitation -- at the invitation of Commander-in-Chief Sarmiento, I was able to visit the beaches of Normandy and actually set foot on the soil of Omaha Beach, as well as attend the D-Day ceremonies in which several veterans, ranging from 98 to 103 years of age, were given the highest medal France gives the Merit of Legion -- the Merit of Legion.

Just to see the smiles on their faces was worth it.

I had the privilege of going to the Dominican Republic for the Commander-in-Chief's trip.

Our members worked together hand in hand to meet the challenge while banding together for our veterans, doing Buddy Poppy's distribution, scholarships, legislative, veterans and family support, and many other programs.

So many joint projects were done, and membership did go up. This is the third year in a row where the Auxiliary has hit 100 percent-plus and the VFW over 100 percent.

The VFW Annual Day of Service was amazing. I was able to get a free -- oh, to get a tree ready to be planted, which will help with the environment. Others did different projects around the world.

Each Department I visited showed me something so unique. I documented them all so that I can take my husband, Stanley, to go see the same things I got to see.

Thank you to the VFW Auxiliary and the VFW members who attended the events.

Chief Sarmiento and I did a joint project together, which included the convenience store and mail room at the VFW National Home. If the VFW raised the money, that's \$52,000 from the Department's minimum, and the Auxiliary did 100. You-all rocked it. This will help the residents of the National Home.

To the Department of Utah members sitting in the audience today, thank you to all of you for your support during my journey that started in 2018 until today. You make me proud to be a member of the Beehive State.

Thank you to my wonderful husband, Stanley, for standing beside me and supporting me in my journey, no matter what I wanted to do. I love you always.

Ellen Sarmiento, my liaison between the VFW and Auxiliary, I loved getting to spend more time with you year by year. You are a beautiful person inside and out, and your family is amazing. The service your kids give back, either by being in the military or supporting, is inspiring.

Thank you for the friendship.

Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento, I feel blessed to have you as my partner on this adventure. You made me feel like a part of the team. My two fondest memories will be laying the wreath at Arlington Cemetery and the D-Day ceremony.

Thank you for being there for me and inviting me. Thank you for always supporting the Auxiliary.

My -- oh, excuse me.

May God bless everyone in this room, those still serving around the world, and those that were unable to attend. Thank you-all for your tireless efforts in supporting our veterans, their families, and our communities, and God bless the United States of America.

AUDIENCE: Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Hold on. Hold on. I'm going to give it a try. Let's give Carla --

AUDIENCE: Woo

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: WOO

AUDIENCE: Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Woo.

AUDIENCE: Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Holy crap. What the hell is this, Jenga? Jesus Christ.

Other than the nomination, election, installation of officers, is there any other business to come before this convention?

AUDIENCE: Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Any other business?

AUDIENCE: Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Look. We'll get to the woos. We got to save them. You can see I ain't wooing too well. I went too hard, too fast on the first day with the woos.

I'll tell you what, I -- if anybody here's a Ric Flair fan, you know how much he woos, and he always hit it. I don't know.

Maybe it was all the booze he drank. I don't know, but he'd hit it.

Is there any other business?

Hearing none, it is now my pleasure to dismiss the Committee on General Resolutions. As always, a job well done by Chairman Bill Thien, Vice Chairman Hal Roesch, and the good members of your committee. Thank you for your diligence and hard work.

And my personal thanks to all the Chairmen, Vice Chairmen, and to all the members of each of our various committees for your time and dedicated efforts. I will now call upon the Adjutant General for any announcements he may have.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: The Commander-in-Chief, Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief, and Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief will maintain their traditional parade following the presentation and placement of their caps, pins, 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 cap, pin, and badge of the Surgeon General and his remarks.

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, SUREGON GENERAL

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you. In accordance with our convention rules and Robert's Rules of Order, newly revised, if only one person is nominated, after ensuring that, in fact, no members present wish to make further nominations, I, acting as Chair, will simply declare that the nominee is elected, thus effecting the election unanimously consent for acclamation.

Why the hell is everybody so happy about that? I mean, it definitely beats the old days, like, Adjutant casts one unanimous ballot. What happened if they -- what happened if body said, no, like you voted on?

I -- you know, that was the dumbest thing ever when we used to do it that way.

We will now proceed with the nomination election in 2024-2025 National Officers -- Officers. I will now reopen the nomination for the Office of Commander-in-Chief. Are there any 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 to close. Seeing no further nominations, I declare Al "The Real Deal" Lipphardt Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for the 2024-2025 year.

Oh. Comrades, now, don't let him fool you. He likes Space Mountain. Oldest ride, longest line. I present to you the Commander-in-Chief elect of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Al Lipphardt. Sergeant-at-Arms, you will now escort the Commander-in-Chief elect to the podium for the presentation of the Commander-in-Chief cap, pin, and badge.

Would you like to say a few words, Commander Lipphardt? Al?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: Sure.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Like to say a few comments, it's all you, my friend.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: Thank you. Can you see me?

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: Okay. Good.

It may not show, but I am extremely proud and very humbled to stand before you as the newly elected and about-to-be-installed Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. But this is not a journey that I have made alone.

The journey started -- and I do have a long -- not really, but I do have some other remarks, but I would be remiss if I didn't say -- did not say that when this journey began, it began at the urging of past National Council of Administration member Pledge Cannon, at the urging of past National Chaplain, from Georgia, James Gray, and, of course, our own past Commander-in-Chief John Gwizdak.

I am blessed to be standing here today. As I campaigned, and you asked, how was I doing? I said it -- "I'm doing great." "What do you think your chances are?" And I said, "It's not up to me. It's up to God. If God wants me to be Commander-in-Chief, I'll be the Commander-in-Chief."

So thank you, Lord, for putting me here today. I have some special people in the audience and on this stage that I just want to recognize.

I have five members from the OCS Class 2-67, also known as 55th Company, from the United States Army Infantry School, Officer Candidate School. And they are here with me today, and I'm going to identify them. And I'm going to ask them to stand up, and I want you to join me in showing them their appreciation -- my -- our appreciation for them taking the time to be here with us.

I feel extremely honored to always be among these men.

Skip Hasley (phonetic), please rise. Charlie Brown, please rise. Bob Gunn Decker, please rise. Howell Eymans (phonetic), please rise. John Rogers, please rise. And Billy Palmer, please rise.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you guys. I salute you. Thank you. Thank you for your continued service as veterans.

Also, and I'm not sure where they -- where they are, but there are -- I know there's a number of -- there's a number of members from the Americal Division that are here.

There are a number of members from the 196th Light Infantry Brigade. Those were two of the units that I served with, and if you're in the audience, please rise so you can be recognized. Good. Thank you.

And there was a historic thing that happened at the convention. Here with us today, again, are VFW members, but in addition to that, there are National Officers with the Military Order of the Purple Heart, and I would ask National Commander Robert and National Senior Vice Commander Traci (phonetic) to please rise and be recognized.

All those people happened before these people, for the most part.

So now, I want to recognize my family – some of my family. We have family members who could not get away for work reasons. They're not here. There are four of my -- four of my grandsons could not be here, but I do want to recognize my eldest daughter and her husband.

Beth Griswald and her husband, T.J. Please rise. Love you. You may sit down.

Next, I would like to recognize our youngest daughter and her husband, as well as my grandchildren. I would ask Christina Mathis and her husband, Russ, to stand.

Our granddaughter – and remain standing. Our granddaughter, Jenny Mathis, our grandson, Josh Mathis, and their oldest son, and my grandson, Sergeant Zachary Mathis of the United States Army. Thank you.

You may be seated. You may be seated. And that ends my few remarks. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I'll tell you what. For Al, let's give him -- well, what's that cute little Army thing you guys say?

AUDIENCE: (sound effect)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: So silly. Oh.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Comrades, as is tradition, the Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief elect will do a parade around the hall to his Army song.

We would appreciate it if you would like to participate by joining in, and I know you Army guys like a parade.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Don't say it.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: That is a cute saying, isn't it, Chief?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Yeah

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Maestro, strike up the Army song.

(SONG PLAYED)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: So while we're waiting for everybody to get seated, a thought just occurred to me. Let's get one of those Army sayings again.

AUDIENCE: (sound effect)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: So stupid. How about let's get one of those -- what is the Marine thing?

AUDIENCE: (sound effect)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Now we know Navy's liberty call.

We don't get involved with all the nonsense. So I heard a new one for the Air Force. I know it ain't aim high. It was per diem.

AUDIENCE: (crosstalk)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Yeah. That's what I heard. It was three star, five star, or do I get an upgrade in a hotel for the Air Force? Now, look. You know only the people in the Air Force could pick on is the Coast Guard. That's Space Force.

They're not even in the family.

I will now reopen nominations for the Office of Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief. Are there any additional nominations for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief? Are there any other nominations for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief? Hearing none, I declare the nominations for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief closed.

Seeing no further nominations, I declare Carol Whitmore elected Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Veteran of Foreign Wars of the United States for the 2024-2025 year.

Comrades, I present to you the Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief elect of the Veteran of Foreign Wars, Carol Whitmore. Sergeant-at-Arms, you will now escort the Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief elect to the podium for the presentation of the Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief cap, pin, and badge.

Would you like to say a few words, Senior Vice Commander Whitmore?

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT: Comrades, it is such an honor to stand before you to represent the greatest service organization in the world, Veterans of Foreign Wars. And I am so proud to do this, and it is a vast understatement to say how grateful I am for this opportunity.

As some of you know, when we were on the Commander's trip down in the Dominican Republic, my

husband had a little health issue, and the VFW family came through for us like nobody else could.

VTS had us out of country within an hour, and due to Commander Sarmiento and Senior Vice Al Lipphardt at the time, we got home, and we got my husband the care that he needed.

So the VFW family is my family. It is my second family, and I thank you so much for what you do.

And please keep that bond going. Nobody else treats us like we do, and nobody will come knocking on your door in ten years and say, "How are you doing?" But the VFW will.

I thank you again for this opportunity, and I will be a good steward of this organization for you. And I will support Commander Lipphardt's programs and his vision for his year, and I thank you again for this wonderful opportunity. Thank you, VFW.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Maestro, strike up the Army song.
(SONG PLAYED)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I will now reopen the nomination for the Office of 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 Timothy Peters elected Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief for the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for the '24-'25 year.

Comrades, I present to you the Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief elect of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Timothy Peters. Sergeant-at-Arms, you will now escort the Junior Vice Commander elect to the podium for the presentation of the Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief cap, pin, and badge. Would you like to say a few words, Junior Vice Commander Peters?

JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT PETERS: Thank you, Chief. Thank all of you.

This has been a very challenging year from me. Most of you might know that I had a life-threatening illness, and with the hundreds of cards and the thousands of prayers that were sent my way by the family called VFW in Auxiliary, I made a speedy recovery.

A full, speedy recovery. Thank you.

I know I got to keep my comments short, so I want to thank a few people.

Post 805 in O'Fallon, Illinois, District 14, and the Department of Illinois for placing me on the path to this event today. Thank you.

I'd like to thank my Post in East Helena, Montana. Department of Montana has been so gracious to support me 100 percent of the way, and I thank you for that, Montana.

And most of all, I would like to thank my family and my wife. Those of you that are active in the organization know that the spouses usually take the brunt of everything.

I'm always gone, I'm always traveling, and she puts up with all that. Barb, I love you very much. And with that, thank you-all. We will support our Commander-in-Chief and our Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief, and we will have a wonderful year because we will follow you where you go, Al. Thank you.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Maestro, strike up the Air Force song.
(SONG PLAYED)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I will now reopen the nomination for the Office of Quartermaster General. Are there any additional nominations for Quartermaster General? Are there any 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 in the United States for the '24-'25 year.

Comrades, you have elected Marc Garduno as Quartermaster General. Would you like to say a few words, Quartermaster General Garduno?

QUARTERMASTER GENERAL GARDUNO: He's already pushing me off the stage. I can't believe it.

This is incredible. Hey, so thank you so much. Thank you to the entire organization.

Thank you to the Department of Delaware, my Post, VFW Post 3238, my headquarter six, the lady that puts up with me all the time, especially being out on the road and of course being a clown at home, right?

Thank you for continuing to place your trust and confidence in me and my ability to serve this organization.

There's much to do, and I'm sure that my schedule is packed tight no sooner I get back to Kansas City.

Comrades, so long as our country and its leaders continue sending its young people into harm's way, I know that VFW

will be here to support them and their families.

Remember this, fellow comrades, every day you rise and put on the VFW's colors. Everything we do, we do for veterans. Thank you very much.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I will now reopen the nomination for the Office of Chaplain. Are there any additional nominations for Chaplain? Are there any other nominations for Chaplain?

Hearing none, I declare the nominations for Chaplain closed. Seeing no further nominations, I declare Peter Hook elected Chaplain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars United States for the '24-'25 year.

Comrades, you have elected Peter Hook as Chaplain. Would you like to say a few words, Chaplain Hook?

CHAPLAIN ELECT HOOK: Dear members of the VFW, I am deeply honored and grateful for the trust you have placed in me by electing me as your VFW National Chaplain. It's a privilege to serve in this role, and I am committed to supporting Chaplains at every level of our organization.

I will continue to collaborate closely with Conference, Department, District, and Post Chaplains, providing guidance and resources to help them fulfill their vital role in ministering effectively to members, comrades, and their families.

I extend a heartfelt thanks to the Eastern Conference, the Department of Pennsylvania, my home Post back in Myerstown, Pennsylvania, and especially to my wife, Carolyn. You have been an instrumental support in my journey, and I look forward to working together to uphold the values and missions of the VFW.

Thank you once again for this opportunity to serve, and together, we will continue to make a positive impact within our community and beyond. Warm regards and blessings on you in the coming year. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I will now reopen the nominations for the Office of Judge Advocate General. Are there any additional nominations for Judge Advocate General? Are there any other nominations for Judge Advocate General?

Hearing none, I declare nominations for Judge Advocate General closed. Seeing no further nominations, I declare Josh Schreck elected Judge Advocate General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for the '24-'25 year.

Comrades, you have elected Josh Schreck the judge Advocate General. Would you like to say a few words, Judge Advocate General Schreck?

JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL ELECT SCHRECK: "No, not" -- but thank you. I heard you, Al.

First and foremost, I want to express my gratitude to my wonderful spouse, Jennifer, and my incredible daughter, Ennis Grace. They are my rock. They make me a better person, and I love you and I thank you for that.

I also want to say thank you to my father-in-law, Bob Crawford, another Navy veteran for you Navy folks. He came all the way out here. I want to extend my appreciation to past Chief Spera, Lawrence, Doc Schmitz, Roesch, Mihelcic, Sarmiento -- almost past Chief.

I don't want to kick you out yet -- and incoming Chiefs Lipphardt and Senior Whitmore. Each of you has been a support and advocate in your own unique, sometimes quirky way, and I thank you for that, Chiefs.

Lastly, I want to thank my home Post, Post 1263 in Renton, Washington, for their continuous support.

I hear you, Traci.

As well as past Department of Washington Commanders Ted Streete, Fred Green, Traci Williams, Paul Herrera, for all the support and guidance they've provided me over the years. I'm losing my voice.

With that, let's continue learning together. Thank you so much.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I will now reopen nomination for the Office of Surgeon General. Are there 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 James Tuorila elected Surgeon General Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for the '24-'25 year. Comrades, you have elected James Tuorila as Surgeon General. Would you like to say a few words, Surgeon General Tuorila?

SURGEON GENERAL ELECT TUORILA: Comrades, brothers, and sisters, what an honor again to be in this position. I have to thank Bob Wallace, past Commander-in-Chief, for encouraging me to run once again for this position.

When he told me we needed someone that's in the healthcare professional with 40 years' experience, I accepted and thanks to the Big Ten and Department of Minnesota, I intend to do the best job I can to serve as your Surgeon General one more time.

Al, I promise to serve with you and the rest of your officers to do the best I can for the VFW.

I am the son of a World War II veteran, nephew of a Korean War -- excuse me -- son-in-law of a Korean War veteran, nephew of a World War II Marine, Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, and Bougainville First Marine Raiders veteran.

I am the husband of a wife who has put up with me for the past 45 years, including six years of graduate school to receive my degree and work in the field as a clinical psychologist, specializing in treating PTSD.

But most of all, I am proud of the nomination speech that was made for me yesterday by a Life member of the VFW, a Gold Legacy Life Member, an Iraq and Korean Defense Bronze Star recipient, my son, retired Army Captain Clint Tuorila.

Department of Minnesota, Dale Hoogeveen, and the rest of the officers, thank you for your support over the years, and I will continue to serve as your State Surgeon, if the Surgeon General's position allows.

But I am so pleased to be there serving all of you, and if any of your conferences, states, or State Surgeons need assistance throughout my year, I will be there for you. Commander Al, thank you for letting me serve on your team. God bless everyone.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We will now have the collective ceremonial parade for the Quartermaster General, Chaplain, Judge Advocate General, Surgeon General. You will now be escorted by the Sergeant-at-Arms, and on a special note, to my right, two seats in on the front row, that's Paul Herrera.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Maestro, strike up the Armed Forces medley.
(SONG PLAYED)

INTRODUCTION: NEWLY ELECTED NATIONAL COUNCIL OF ADMINISTRATION MEMBERS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Must be Garduno paying the bills. He's so cheap he probably said turn them down, they charge us for the electric. I will now call upon the Adjutant General to announce the newly elected National Council of Administrator members.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: All newly elected Council members will please rise and make their way to the stage.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, with the assistance of the National Surgeon, I will ask that you place the caps on their heads as I call them up to the center of the stage.

The Commander-in-Chief elect will now present caps and badges to the newly elected Council members. They are Daniel Garcia from the Department of Alaska.

Jeffrey Eiler from the Department of Arizona.

Dawn Napier from the Department of California.

David Stone from the Department of Colorado.

Ronald Schaedel, Sr. from the Department of Hawaii.

Bobby Tettleton from the Department of Idaho.

Patrick Briggs from the Department of Kansas.

James Layton from the Department of Montana.

David Sousa from the Department of Nevada.

Victoria Haddox from the Department of New Mexico.

William Tuff from the Department of North Dakota.

Bert Key from the Department of Oregon.

Kenneth Stein from the Department of the Pacific Areas.

Heath Silcox from the Department of Utah.

The one and only Paul Herrera from the Department of Washington.

Danielle Smith from the Department of Wyoming.

Victor Letourneau from the Department of North Carolina.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief Sarmiento, that concludes the capping of our newly elected Council members.

ANNOUNCEMENT/REMARKS: NATIONAL APPOINTED OFFICERS

ADJUTANT GENERAL

CHIEF OF STAFF, INSPECTOR GENERAL, NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Let me please call on Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt for his announcement of appointed officers for the ensuing year.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: My appointments for the term for which I am elected are Adjutant General, Dan West of Texas.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Comrades, I would just like to thank Commander-in-Chief, Al Lipphardt, for the confidence he placed in me to serve on his staff as your Adjutant General. I assure you, Chief, as I assure all of you,

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.

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 both the VFW and the Auxiliary.

You have always had and will continue to have my sincere pledge of faithful and devoted love, and yes, after three-and-a-half years, we can finally go on our honeymoon.

My fellow comrades in arms of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, it is indeed a great honor to serve as your Adjutant General for the 2024-2025 year. And I can assure you, just as we have the last two years, that the National Headquarters staff stands ready to help you be as successful as you want to be and each of you have our sincere pledge of duty.

To the National Council members and Department leaders, I am blessed to work with each of you and I assure you that your passion is as strong as mine, and you will always have full transparency and my loyalty to the by-laws of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Chief Sarmiento, Chief Borland, it has truly been an honor and privilege to have served as your Adjutant General over the past two years.

Patriots, comrades, past Chiefs, National leaders, Chief Lipphardt, thank you, as it is truly an honor to serve with you, for I can think of no safer place to be than among your ranks.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: Chief-of- Staff, Jeff Carroll of Georgia.

CHIEF-OF-STAFF ELECT CARROLL: Chief, I want to thank you for the appointment. For my remarks, I just have one item in 27 parts.

Thank you for the appointment. I want to thank my beautiful wife, Lisa, for all of her support. I have three kids, Angela, Madison, and Dylan, and my grandson Shinji (phonetic) for all of the support they've given.

Comrades, we are all in this year, and I'm going to do everything I can to support the Chiefs and to help you be successful. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: And my appointment for Inspector General, Greg Stafford, North Carolina.

INSPECTOR GENERAL ELECT STAFFORD: Well, I wasn't prepared to speak, but any past State Commander is always prepared to speak, right?

I'd like to thank Al Lipphardt for the opportunity to work in this position with his administration. He's got a great group of State Commanders that are very motivated, and they want to, you know, hit the road running.

To paraphrase Duane, Duane had a very successful year last year. He worked hard and everything went -- everything -- but to paraphrase him is, the work of the VFW is never done. And let's get -- let's get hot and get busy and make things happen.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: And my appointment for Sergeant-at-Arms is Brian Willette of Massachusetts. Now the presentation of the cap and badge.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Thank you, Chief, for this appointment. I was capped today by two Sergeants representing the generation of Vietnam veterans who taught us how to be soldiers.

And on behalf of the Sergeants, we are honored to be following a combat infantryman, a Purple Heart recipient, and a veteran of the Vietnam War into the future, Al Lipphardt. And at the request of the Chief at this time, we ask all Vietnam veterans rise to be recognized.

Thank you for your service.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We will now proceed with the installation of officers. National Sergeant-at-Arms, you will escort the Installing Officer to the position on my right.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, it is my honor to present the Installing Officer for this convention, past Commander-in-Chief Larry Rivers. Thank you, sir.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, the term for which you and your subordinate officers were elected or appointed has now expired. It is my duty to ascertain the following.

Have officers for the ensuing year been duly elected?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: They have.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: Have the books of the Adjutant General and the Quartermaster General been examined and approved by the National Council of Administration?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: They have.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: Does the Adjutant General have on file proof of eligibility for all the officers to be installed during this installation?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: He does.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: 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 SARMIENTO: They are.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: Have you the charter in your possession?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I have.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: You will now surrender the gavel to me.

Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento, 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. Please 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 Al Lipphardt.

Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore.

Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Timothy Peters.

Adjutant General Dan West.

Quartermaster General Marc Garduno.

Chaplain Peter Hook.

Judge Advocate General Josh Schreck.

Sergeant General James Tuorila.

Chief-of-Staff Jeff Carroll.

Inspector General Gregory Stafford.

Sergeant-at-Arms Brian Willette.

Newly elected Council members, Daniel Garcia, Alaska.

Jeffrey Eiler, Arizona.

Dawn Napier, California.

David Stone, Colorado.

Ronald Schaedel, Sr., Hawaii.

Bobby Tettleton, Idaho.

Patrick Briggs, Kansas.

James Layton, Montana.

David Sousa, Nevada.

Victoria Haddox, New Mexico.

William Tuff, North Dakota.

Bert Key, Oregon.

Kenneth Stein, Pacific Areas.

Heath Silcox, Utah.

Paul Herrera, Washington.

Danielle Smith, Wyoming.

Victor LeTourneau, North Carolina.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Installing Officer, the officers elect have been properly assembled for the purpose of installation, sir.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: National Officers elect to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, I will administer to you the officer's obligation.

You will raise your right hand, touch the flag of our country with your left hand, and repeat after me. I do hereby solemnly promise --

OFFICERS: I do hereby solemnly promise --

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- that I will faithfully discharge to the best of my abilities -

OFFICERS: -- that I will faithfully discharge to the best of my abilities --

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- the duties of the office to which I have been elected or appointed

OFFICERS: -- the duties of the office to which I have been elected or appointed --

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- according to the bylaws and ritual --

OFFICERS: -- according to the bylaws and ritual --

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.
 OFFICERS: -- of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.
 PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: I solemnly promise --
 OFFICERS: I solemnly promise --
 PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- that at the close of the term to which I have been elected or appointed --
 OFFICERS: -- that at the close of the term to which I have been elected or appointed --
 PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- or sooner if so ordered by proper authority --
 OFFICERS: -- or sooner if so ordered by proper
 PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- I will surrender immediately --
 OFFICERS: I will surrender immediately --
 PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- to only the duly authorized person or persons --
 OFFICERS: -- to only the duly authorized person or persons --
 PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- all records, money, or other properties of this organization --
 OFFICERS: -- all records, money, or other properties of this organization --
 PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- in my possession or under my control.
 OFFICERS: -- in my possession or under my control.
 PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: All this I freely promise --
 OFFICERS: All this I freely promise --
 PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- upon my honor as a loyal citizen of our great republic --
 OFFICERS: -- upon my honor as a loyal citizen of our great republic --
 PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- so help me God.
 OFFICERS: -- so help me God.
 PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: As you were. Parade rest. National Chaplain David Frei.
 CHAPLAIN FREI: Uncover.
 Thank you, Lord, for watching over this convention and making it the success it has been.
 We pray for your blessings and guidance to each of our new officers. Give them the strength and perseverance to meet the never ending challenges of leadership demands.
 Lord, may each person that came to this convention return to their home safely.
 Bless us, Lord, for the new year, and may we come back next year better than ever. Amen.
 PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: As you were.
 National Sergeant-at-Arms, you will now escort the officers to their respective stations.
 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Yes, sir, Comrade Installing Officer, sir.
 PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: Please be seated. Officers, remain standing, please.
 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Comrade Installing Officer, it is my honor to present Commander-in- Chief elect, Al Lipphardt.
 PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: National Officers of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, you now occupy the positions of honor to which your comrades have elected you. Learn well the responsibilities entrusted to you so you may intelligently discharge the duties you are to undertake.
 The bylaws and ritual of our organization prescribe in detail the duties of your respective offices. By virtue of the confidence placed in you through your election or appointment, we assume that you will acquaint yourselves thoroughly with your duties. Officers, you may be seated.
 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: All rise.
 PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: Commander-in- Chief Al Lipphardt, before administering your obligation, it is proper to remind you of certain duties. You will be held personally responsible for the charter of this organization, and at the end of your term of office, you will deliver it to the officer appointed to install your successor.
 It is your duty to see that all National Officers perform their duties to the best of their ability. You shall keep yourself informed on all proposed legislation which may affect the welfare of potential and actual comrades of this organization.
 Strive for adoption of only those measures which will be beneficial. You will be required to devote all of your time to the many duties of your office. You are expected to make a special study of the congressional charter, bylaws, and ritual of this organization so that you may render firm and impartial decisions on important questions referred to you.
 As Commander-in-Chief, you will be regarded by your comrades and by the general public as typifying wise and vigorous leadership in the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

May all your efforts and accomplishments bring credit to your administration and to our organization.
Comrade Al Lipphardt, are you willing and ready to assume your solemn obligation?
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: I am.
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: 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 --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: In the presence of Almighty God --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- and the office and delegates of this organization here assembled --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- and the -- and the officers and delegates of this -- here assembled --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: I --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: I, Al Lipphardt --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- do hereby solemnly promise --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- do hereby solemnly promise --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- that I will faithfully discharge --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- that I will faithfully discharge --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- to the best of my ability --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- to the best of my ability --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- the duties of the Office of Commander-in-Chief --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- the duties of the Office of Commander-in-Chief --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- to which I have been elected --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- to which I have been elected --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- in accordance with the bylaws and rituals --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- in accordance with the bylaws and rituals --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: I solemnly promise --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: I solemnly promise --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- that at the close of the term to which I have been elected --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- that at the close of the term to which I have been elected -
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- or sooner if so ordered by proper authority --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- or sooner if so ordered by proper authority --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- I will surrender immediately --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- I will surrender immediately --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- to only the duly authorized person or persons --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- to only the duly authorized person or persons --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- the national charter --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- the national charter --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- all records --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- all records --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- money --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- money --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- and other properties of this organization --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- and other properties of this organization --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- in my possession --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- in my possession --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- or under my control.
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- or under my control.
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: I do further solemnly promise --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: I do further solemnly promise --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- that I will be fair and impartial --
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- that I will be fair and impartial --
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- in my actions towards all comrades.
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- in my actions towards all comrades.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: And I will always strive to promote the best interests --

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: And I will always strive to perform the best interests --

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: -- of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: So help me God.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: So help me God.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I now place in your possession our charter. Also, I present you with this gavel, which is the emblem of your authority. Use it firmly but with discretion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: Thank you.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: All National Officers, please stand. Stretch forth your right hand and repeat after me. Comrade Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt --

OFFICERS: Comrade Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt --

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: -- to you I pledge my sincere allegiance.

OFFICERS: -- to you I pledge my sincere allegiance.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: As you were.

Commander-in-Chief, officers, and delegates of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, I am honored to now proclaim the National Officers duly installed and this organization in working order for the ensuing year.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: Thank you, Chief.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: Congratulations.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: I now call on Commander-in-Chief Sarmiento to conduct the ceremony presentation of lapel pins.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Will the Junior and Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief elects please step forward?

Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Whitmore is passing on the Junior Commander-in-Chief pin to Tim Peters. Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt will present the Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief pin to Carol Whitmore. I will now present Commander-in-Chief Lipphardt his Commander-in-Chief pin.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Now presenting the Commander-in-Chief with his Gold membership card and his past Commander-in-Chief pin as past Commander-in-Chief Doc Schmitz.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Something that we kind of got started, because it got lost when it was another vendor -- I don't know. Anyway, it's truly an honor to pass on Chief Lipphardt his Commander-in-Chief ring.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF DUANE SARMIENTO FINAL REMARKS

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Comrades, I want to thank Chief Lipphardt for allowing me to give my final remarks to this body.

I am deeply honored to have the privilege of serving as your Commander-in-Chief.

You know what? You can tell the teleprompter people I don't need them. I don't even need -- I'm -- from the heart.

Other than the birth of my children and my wife and family, this has been the best experience of my life. To be able to serve you and military members, their families, understanding that our organization makes a damn difference.

That's what we got to pass on. I don't -- you know what, Al? This is the last time I'm going to do it. Can I give them a couple woos? I tried to save them. Where are you? Where the hell are you, Al?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: I'm here.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Can I give them a couple woos? Woo. Woo.

AUDIENCE: Woo.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Ellen, my wife, truly my rock, after three long years on the road -- and for those of you who don't know -- You may be new-timers, or you're new of the VFW. Maybe you just don't. When you're in the Chairs, the Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief and Junior -- and Senior are on the road 270 days a year. As Commander-in-Chief, and that's just the nature of the schedule -- I was on the road about 320 days this year -- counting the 270 the last two years.

Ellen, I just want to say, I'm coming home. I look forward to our next chapter in our life. I want to thank you for all you do.

I want to thank -- you know what the most important thing I want to thank you for? Your friendship. As I traveled around, I hit almost -- most of the Departments.

In three years, it's such a schedule. Everything is on the same weekends, but you welcomed me like part of the family. And I hope it wasn't because, well, you're the Commander-in-Chief or you're the Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief.

I would like to think it's because, like we do, we all spend time in the military. It's that band of brother mentality, and when I say band of brothers, I'm not excluding the female veterans. It's just a saying. Right now we say band of brothers and sisters. I got it.

But you welcomed me into your Departments. It's most incredible.

To the newer -- to the newer members out there or even the ones who are really getting involved, and I tell everybody, keep that fire going. Don't let no one stop your passion. You know, when I took this a year ago, what did I call them? The bar commanders and the shit house sea lawyers that are in every Post.

They want to take away all your thunder and lightning because they did it in 1985, and it didn't work. Keep the -- keep the fire.

Keep that passion, this organization that we love.

Al, thank you for the opportunity to address you one last time from this podium. It is my honor. I'm not going anywhere. I look to renewing our friendships as we go around. Al Lipphardt, Chief Lipphardt, you got a hell of a team here with Carol and Tim.

This thing doesn't skip a beat. We're going to continue to push forward and make this the greatest veterans service organization -- or not make it. Keep it the greatest veterans service organization, because no one, and I mean no one, does more for veterans. Thank you very much to all of you. Woo.

AUDIENCE: Woo.

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH: COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT ALFRED LIPPHARDT

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: So before I begin my remarks, I've got a couple of things to say. They're not on the script. I'm off script because I want you to know that we are all a team. We started out as a team. We've got the class of '24-'25 team tribe. I needed to find out who the team was.

You know, Patton said you don't go to war with the Army you'd like to have. You go to -- you go to war with the Army you have. And I wanted to find out what we look like, so I sent them a poll. I sent them a little -- fill out a little bio so I know something about you.

Your Commanders represent every single branch of the military. Combined, they represent 763 years wearing the fabric of this nation. They have been deployed to every operation, every theater since the -- since the Korean War.

They've been in the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Our most junior State Commander joined in 2018. Our most senior Commander joined the VFW in 1971. That's 550 years of Veterans of Foreign Wars knowledge.

They are prepared. They are pumped. They are ready to go.

And now, I -- I'd like to go back to the beginning, please. I want to thank you for your support, love, and respect, and trust.

To my VFW comrades, Auxiliary brothers and sisters, distinguished guests, and my family, I'm deeply humbled to stand before you today, having been elected and installed to the highest Office of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, Commander-in-Chief.

Standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, the founders from the Spanish-American War, followed by World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and deployments where you placed yourselves between the weapons of our enemies and these shores.

It is my custom when I speak to groups like yourself, I want to invite five Vietnam veterans to join me here at the podium.

Private Lewis Sloan of East Point, Georgia, Corporal Kenneth Adams of Santa Clara, California, Corporal Philip Adams of Croton Falls, New York, Robert Weddell of Batavia, Ohio, and Rodney Logan of Newark, New Jersey.

You don't see them moving around. They're not in the hall. I said I wanted them to join me here, but they can't.

Lewis Sloan was killed in action on November the 16th, 1967 after stepping on a mine. Kenneth Adams, Philip Adams, Robert Weddell, and Rodney Logan were killed on action on November the 23rd, 1967 from enemy weapons and shrapnel, rocket propelled grenades, and hand grenades, during an intense battle with the elements of the 2nd North Vietnamese Army Division.

Their names are inscribed on the wall in Washington, D.C., but they live forever in my heart.

These men served under my command when they paid the ultimate price for our freedom. I promised myself those who gave the full measure of devotion would be honored for their service and sacrifice by saying their names whenever I had an opportunity.

No greater love hath a man than to lay down his life for his friends.

I've only been a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars for 20 years, but I have seen too many of our members who have forgotten our roots. Whatever the branch, whatever the military specialty or whatever conflict you were in, let us never forget those who no longer have a voice.

You and I speak for them.

You elected me to lead this organization in accordance with the national bylaws, manual procedure and ritual, to which I was installed. Lead, I shall.

Your Department State Commanders were provided an alert order when they were elected to Junior Vice Commander. When they became Senior Vice Commander, I issued a warning order. It happened to coincide on Pearl Harbor Day, December 7th, 1923, though.

The full order, Operation All In, was issued on April the 19th, Patriots' Day, 2024, because we get -- need to get back to who we are. We are veterans. We are warriors.

Today is August the 1st, 2024. It's D-Day. It kicks off at noon. It's not an exercise. It's not a drill. We've been preparing for this minute -- this moment for three years.

In 2023, we focused on "Every Veteran Counts", successfully achieving those goals because you came together. You realized how critical our membership is to mission accomplishment.

In '23-'24, we focused on credibility under the label of "Meet the Challenge". Again, you realized how critical it is for this nation's veterans to know that when we speak, we speak the truth.

The principles we were founded upon 125 years ago remain our bedrock. The legislative accomplishments this year that our organization spearheaded and successfully passed, during what I'll call a politically charged congress, is monumental.

In addition, you met the challenge by increasing our membership under the leadership of Chief Sarmiento.

The oath of enlistment that you and I took, it ended with four words, just as this did this morning. "So help me God."

This year, '24-'25, our focus at all levels is on courage. This will take courage. I am not -- I do not question your courage.

What separates us from others is that when you raised your hand and you said, "I will go if called on," you went, and you placed yourself between the weapons of our enemies and these shores.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Posts are some of the very few places where heroes gather and warriors meet. Too many people in this nation have forgotten what it is to be a warrior.

Heroes are what others think of us. Warriors is who we are. With changing geo -- social economic conditions, partisan politics, we have seemed to lost sight of the most critical treasure lost to war, our sons and our daughters.

Failing to have a clear plan to achieve victory appears to be the case in our strategies over these last five decades.

Many of our soldiers, sailors, Marines, airmen perceive they are but pawns to be used in -- over and over in the global war on terror. The material cost of war and the lifetime of grief and tragedy, both physically and mentally, to our warriors and their families is quickly forgotten by our nation's leaders.

Even more dangerous to this nation is the failure of our leaders to keep their promises made to those ordered to place themselves in harm's way to defend this nation. Slowness to grant healthcare, service-connected disabilities, is only one part of this failure.

We depend on a volunteer military. Recruiting is at an -- at an all-time low, and that's across the board in all services. You know, those who've deployed to combat, we have very long memories. The memories I'm talking about are those of 1975 and the evacuation of Saigon.

The memories came rushing back when we saw the debacle in Afghanistan at Bagram Airbase as our equipment was abandoned, but more tragically was witnessing our troops and allies being left behind. That is unacceptable.

When I hear someone from the administration say, "One thing you can count on is we'll bring you home," well, where is it? Stop talking to us and start taking action because that is what '24-'25 is going to do.

We're going to have the courage of our convictions to stand up and make sure they understand, in not quite infantry language, that we are not going to stand it anymore.

In 2018, I introduced my vision for the future.

Thank you.

That vision was commitment, credibility, and courage. You and I know membership is more than about numbers. We're not numbers. We're people. We're patriots.

I'm proud to share with my community I'm a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. I took that same oath as you did, and if called upon, my word is my bond. It was for love of country. I wanted to be an example for others to follow.

So going off-script here just a little bit.

I would go today -- when I talk to Congress and I say to the Congress -- a Congress representative or senator, "I'll go to war today under three conditions.

The first one is I'm an infantry soldier. I'm a warrior. I was trained to close with and destroy the enemy. And when I do that, which is what you sent me to do, I am coming home because I am a peacemaker.

I'm not a peacekeeper. Peacekeepers are law enforcement officers. If that's the purpose, send cops. Don't send warriors.

You send warriors, people are going to get hurt because that's the only way you achieve victory is to conquer the enemy."

So when I said have the courage of your conviction, the most important character trait you have and I have is credibility, also known as integrity. It's the only element that belongs to you and to no one else.

That is your word.

Of the values we learned when we entered the service, loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, integrity, honor, personal courage, none is more important than integrity. If your word is not to be trusted, everything and anything you do is unreliable.

You cannot be called on, and you certainly cannot be counted on.

There is no place in the Veterans of Foreign Wars for these individuals. They belong to you. They belong to me. Take care of it. Do what needs to be done.

When you talk about members of the VFW, you're talking about our nation's heroes and warriors, often and women who would sacrifice all to keep our loved ones safe and secure with our constitution.

That all men are created equal and are endowed by the creator with certain inalienable rights, of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The vision for '24-'25 is courage.

I had three uncles who served in World War II. Two were Army. One was Navy. Our family was very proud of them. One of them went on to make military a career, also serving in the Korean War. It was on D-Day, he was with the 82nd Airborne and landed in Anzio, and then went on to the Battle of the Bulge in Market Garden.

Unfortunately, I was not close to him, as he seemed to be always deployed overseas. Edward J. Simmons, Colonel of the United States Army, he was -- he was a warrior. Battlefield commissioned, several silver stars, bronze stars for valor, Purple Hearts. I certainly viewed him as that warrior.

In my pre-teens I remember a conversation with him, and he asked me what I was going to do with my life. I was 11 in 1957. I didn't even know what I was going to do for the next 15 minutes, much less what I had considered to be for the rest of my life.

I didn't remember what he said until many years later when a fellow Vietnam veteran and a Rotarian I respected -- my Uncle Eddie's words were, "The talent you have is your gift from God. The use of that talent is your gift to God."

As I remembered, I thought, did I really hear those words from him?

I'm telling you, the guy was rock hard.

But then I also remember what followed. He said, "I chose to be a soldier. I chose to be a peacemaker, a warrior of God, because evil exists, and it cannot be appeased. It cannot be reasoned with, or it can't be converted.

That's utopia. We're not living in utopia. Evil is. And there is only one way to eliminate it, and that is to destroy it wherever it appears."

Like many of you in this room, I've seen the face of evil. So my ask is for you to embrace the vision of courage. Rekindle the warrior's fire in your belly. Put that vision into action. I am proud to lead you as together we see the -- we seek the courage to be the best we can be in all things and at all times.

Stand steadfast for righteousness' sake. Apply the beliefs you held when you raised your hand for the final 100 yards of the battlefield because the battlefield belongs to you.

Believe in what you do. Do what you believe in.

And I'm going to end with this from St. Jerome. "Good, better, best. Never let it rest until your good is better and your better is best." Be the best you can be at all times and in all things.

God bless you. God bless the Veterans of Foreign Wars and Auxiliary, and God bless the United States of America.

Follow me.

CLOSING CEREMONIES

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Comrades, just a few quick announcements. Council of the Administration meeting will happen one hour after the closing.

Side boys, if you will make your way over. On your way out of the hall today, make sure you pick up Chief's and the President's Reception. Remember, make plans for dinner. This is not an all you can eat banquet.

And we have some breaking news that came in. Wall Street Journal reporter, Evan Gershkovich, and former U.S. Marine, Paul Whelan, and a number of Americans who are expected to be released as part of the biggest prisoner exchange between the U.S. and Russia since the end of the Cold War, according to a senior administration official.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I move that the precedence of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, 125th National Convention, be submitted to the Speaker of the House for printing as a house document in accordance with Public Law 620 of the 90th Congress, approved October 2nd of 1968, and entitled as Title 44 United States Code Section 13.32.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We need a second. Do we have a second on the motion? I got it.

We have a motion second. Any questions on the motion? Any questions on the motion?

There being no further business to come before this convention, and the officers having been duly elected and installed for the ensuing year, I move that the 125th Convention of Foreign Wars of the United States be closed.

You're saying, big print, Dan. I can't even see the damn thing. I don't even know where we're at. Where are we? I've been using 24 font all week. Now, all of a sudden, I'm using, like, 12.

Where are we? Oh.

Look at that. I can read.

You have before you -- didn't we just do this? We did the ayes and the nays. Oh. Crazy.

CHAPLAIN ELECT HOOK: All those in favor, say—

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: All those in favor, please loudly say aye.

AUDIENCE: Aye.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Opposed. Ayes have it. Sergeant-at-Arms, you will proceed with the closing ceremonies.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Yes, sir, Comrade Commander-in-Chief, sir. Captain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Honor Guard, advance for the purpose of retiring the colors.

VFW National Honor Guard, retrieve the colors.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Honor Guard, carry colors. Forward march. Detail hut.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Comrade National Chaplain, would you lead us in our closing prayer? Uncover. Parade rest.

CHAPLAIN ELECT HOOK: Oh, sovereign God, as we come to the close of this convention, we pray your blessing and guidance on each of our new officers, especially our new Commander-in-Chief, Al Lipphardt, and his staff of newly elected officers.

Collectively, give them wisdom as they deliberate together to make our organization better. Lord, may each person's life be enriched by the spirit of camaraderie. Bless us as we separate. Give us journey and mercies and strength as we seek to carry out our responsibilities well.

In your name, amen.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, ten-hut. Present. Center face. Detail hut. Forward march. Detail hut. Order hut.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you --

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Comrade Commander-in-Chief --

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I'm -- I can't read the words, Brian. I don't --

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, that completes closing ceremonies of this 125th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Thank you. Comrades, please stand -- please be -- stand fast for just a second.

This afternoon's Council Administration meeting will begin exactly one hour from now.

We're going to -- we're going to stand by for --

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Side boys, Post. Commander-in-Chief, request permission to go ashore.
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT LIPPHARDT: Go ashore.
ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars for 2023-2024 departing.
Comrades, the 125th National Convention is closed. We are adjourned.
(125TH NATIONAL CONVENTION CONCLUDED AT 10:03 A.M. ET)

**AMENDMENTS TO THE NATIONAL BYLAWS/MANUAL
OF PROCEDURE AND RITUAL
AT THE 125TH NATIONAL CONVENTION
JULY 27-AUGUST 1, 2024, LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY**

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO NATIONAL BYLAWS

C-1

Proposed by Department of Georgia

CONGRESSIONAL CHARTER

Sec. 230101 - Organization.

Amend Sec. 230101 - Organization., Congressional Charter, under **(a) Federal Charter.**, by replacing “and airmen” with “airmen and guardians”.

B-1

Proposed by Department of Georgia

ARTICLE I – MEMBERS

Sec. 101 - Eligibility.

Amend Sec. 101 - Eligibility., National Bylaws, by replacing (2) with the text below and renumbering the current language in (2) and (3) as (3) and (4):

“(2) in a foreign war, insurrection or expedition which service has been recognized with an individual military medal or devices for valor or performance in foreign combat and is governed by the authorization of the award of an individual military medal by the Government of the United States, or”

B-2

Recommended by National Bylaws Study Group

Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief

ARTICLE I – MEMBERS

Sec. 101 – Eligibility.

Amend Sec. 101 - Eligibility., National Bylaws, (3), by adding “; or” at the end of the sentence and the following as (4):

“(4) in Cold War Service deployed on the continent of Africa, Asia, or Europe or their territorial waters for not less than 60 consecutive days, between September 2, 1945, and December 26, 1991.”

B-3

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.”

B-4

Proposed by Department of Massachusetts

ARTICLE I – MEMBERS

Sec. 111 – Life Members.

Amend Sec. 111 – Life Members., National Bylaws, under **(b) Life Membership Fees**, under Attained Age and Plan E Life Member Fee, by replacing “81 & over” with the following and adding new age ranges and fees as follows:

<u>"Attained Age"</u>	<u>Plan E Life Member Fee</u>
81 – 90	\$170
91 – 99	\$125
100 & over	\$80"

B-5

Proposed by Department of Wisconsin

ARTICLE II – POSTS

Sec. 216 – Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees.

Amend Sec. 216 - Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees., National By-Laws, (b), by adding "may appoint" before "Service Officer."

B-6

Proposed by Department of Wisconsin

ARTICLE II – POSTS

Sec. 216 – Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees.

Amend Sec. 216 - Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees., National By-Laws, (c), by removing "Surgeon".

B-7

Proposed by Department of Virginia

ARTICLE II – POSTS

Sec. 216 – Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees.

Amend Sec. 216 - Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees., National Bylaws, (c), at the end of the sentence, by replacing "required" with "allowed".

B-8

Proposed by Department of New York

ARTICLE II – POSTS

Sec. 216 – Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees.

Amend Sec. 216 - Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees., National Bylaws, under (c), by replacing the current language with the following:

"The Post shall elect or the Post Commander shall appoint a Judge Advocate, Surgeon, Officer of the Day and/or Guard if appointment rather than election is required by Post Bylaws."

B-9

Proposed by Department of Georgia

ARTICLE II – POSTS

Sec. 220 – Vacancies and Removal of Elected Officers or Committee Members.

Amend Sec. 220 - Vacancies and Removal of Elected Officers or Committee Members., National Bylaws, by changing the section title and section language to include "Delegates" and read as follows:

"Sec. 220 – Vacancies and Removal of Elected Officers, Delegates or Committee Members.

Vacancies. All vacancies occurring in the elected offices or delegates of the Post shall be filled in accordance with Section 220 of the Manual of Procedure at the next regular or special meeting as prescribed in Section 203 of the Manual of Procedure.

Removal. Elected officers, elected delegates, or elected committee members may be removed for just cause by the Post or the Department Commander as prescribed in Section 220 of the Manual of Procedure.

Any elected Post officer, delegate, or committee member removed, by reason of failure to pay current dues or under the provisions of this section shall not be eligible to serve in any Post office or committee or as a delegate in the same administrative year in which the officer, delegate, or committee member is removed.”

B-10

Proposed by Department of Virginia

ARTICLE IV – DISTRICTS

Sec. 416 – Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees.

Amend Sec. 416 - Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees., National Bylaws, (c), at the end of the sentence, by replacing “required” with “allowed”.

B-11

Proposed by Department of New York

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 (c), by replacing the current language with the following:

“The District shall elect or the District Commander shall appoint a Judge Advocate, Surgeon, Chief of Staff or Officer of the Day if appointment rather than election is required by District Bylaws.”

B-12

Proposed by Department of Virginia

ARTICLE V – DEPARTMENTS

Sec. 516 – Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees.

Amend Sec. 516 - Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees., National Bylaws, (c), at the end of the sentence, by replacing “required” with “allowed”.

B-13

Proposed by Department of North Carolina

ARTICLE VI – NATIONAL

Sec. 616 – Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees.

Amend Sec. 616 - Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees., National Bylaws, under (a), by adding “Adjutant General” after “Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief”.

Under (b), remove “Adjutant General”.

B-14

Proposed by Department of North Carolina

ARTICLE VI – NATIONAL

Sec. 617 – Nomination, Election, Installation and Term of Office.

Amend Sec. 617 - Nomination, Election, Installation and Term of Office., National Bylaws, by replacing the last paragraph with the following:

“The Commander-in-Chief, Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief, Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief, Chaplain, Judge Advocate General and Surgeon General shall be elected for a term of one (1) year. The Adjutant General and Quartermaster General shall be elected to serve a term of four (4) years with the opportunity to hold a second four (4) term, if elected. National Officers shall assume their duties at the close of the National Convention.”

B-15

Recommended by National Bylaws Study Group

Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief

ARTICLE VI – NATIONAL

Sec. 618 – Officers: Duties and Obligations.

Amend Sec. 618 - Officers: Duties and Obligations., National Bylaws, under **(a) Commander-in-Chief, (6)**, by replacing the current language with the following:

“(6) Immediately upon entering office, appoint the Adjutant General who shall be a full-time salaried officer of the organization, subject to approval by a majority of the National Council of Administration.”

B-16

Recommended by National Bylaws Study Group

Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief

ARTICLE VI – NATIONAL

Sec. 619 – National Committees.

Amend Sec. 619 - National Committees., National Bylaws, in the first paragraph, by adding “c. National Legislative Committee.”

Add the following at the end of the section:

“(c) National Legislative Committee.

(1) Composition: The National Legislative Committee shall consist of committee members appointed by each Department Commander with the approval of the Commander-in-Chief. Department Commanders shall receive one committee appointment for every eight members of the federal Congressional delegation for the states and/or territories that comprise the Department. Appointments to the committee must be approved by the current Department Commander, the current Department Senior Vice Commander, and the current Department Junior Vice Commander. Committee members shall be appointed to a three-year term with one-third of the committee receiving appointments each year. The Commander-in-Chief shall select a chairman for the committee and shall consult the Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief, Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief, and immediate Past Commander-in-Chief on selection of vice chairs. The Commander-in-Chief may remove committee members for failure to discharge their duties or for other conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline.

(2) Duties: The National Legislative Committee shall formally meet twice each year in Washington, D.C. to conduct training and advance the VFW legislative priority goals in accordance with the organization’s legislative and welfare programs and policies approved by the National Convention. Committee members shall continually advance the VFW legislative priority goals in their home states and territories between formal meetings and shall complete monthly activity reports for submission to the Adjutant General or the Adjutant General’s duly appointed authority in the VFW Washington office. The Commander-in-Chief may call additional meetings of the committee or promulgate General Orders necessary to the committee for the effective discharge of its business. Committee members shall discharge all duties in compliance with Section 702 of the National Bylaws.”

B-17

Proposed by Department of Oklahoma

ARTICLE VII – MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

Sec. 709 – Control of Units.

Amend Sec. 709 - Control of Units., National Bylaws, in the first paragraph, first sentence, by adding “and its subordinate units” after “United States” and “other” after the first word “any”.

B-18

Proposed by the National Judge Advocate General

ARTICLE VII – MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

Sec. 717

Amend Sec. 717, National Bylaws, by adding a section title and the language below:

“Sec. 717 – Prohibition on Personal Gain; Conflicts of Interest.

1. No officer, past or present of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States shall use any VFW title or position he or she currently possesses or has possessed for personal private gain or for the private gain of any family member, personal friend, business associate or other person with whom a personal relationship exists.
2. No officer or member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States shall at any meeting or any other situation wherein VFW business is being transacted, either formally or informally, participate in any discussion or vote relating to any matter in which he or she may receive personal private gain or any matter that may bestow private gain on any family member, personal friend, business associate or other person with whom a personal relationship exists. When such a situation presents itself, the officer or member must announce his or her conflict of interest and recuse him or herself from the discussion and/or vote.
3. Nothing within this Section shall be interpreted to preclude an officer, past or present or a member of the VFW from referencing their VFW membership or any VFW position held when describing his or her professional experience or involvement in a veteran service organization so long as the officer, past or present or member does not infer or imply the VFW endorses any product, service or enterprise. In addition, nothing in this Section shall be interpreted to preclude an officer, past or present or a member of the VFW from engaging in organizational sponsorship activities under the same terms and conditions offered to the general public.”

B-19

Proposed by Department of Colorado

ARTICLE IX – DISCIPLINE

Sec. 902 – Offenses.

Amend Sec. 902 - Offenses., National Bylaws, No. 5., by adding the following at the end of the sentence:

“as long as the conviction, the guilty plea, or no contest plea, occurs after being accepted as a member.”

B-20

Proposed by the National Judge Advocate General

ARTICLE IX – DISCIPLINE

Sec. 903 - Procedure for Disciplinary Actions.

Amend Sec. 903 - Procedure for Disciplinary Actions., National Bylaws, under (a), by adding the following as (4):

- “4. No Disciplinary Action may be taken with respect to the act or acts of a member unless the Disciplinary Action has been initiated in accordance with Section 903(c) of the National Bylaws within one year of the offense having been committed but said time period shall be extended where the member has taken steps to conceal the act or acts from discovery in which case the one year period of time begins upon the date of discovery.”

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 **ELIGIBILITY GUIDE**, in the second paragraph, by adding the following at the end of the first sentence:

“; or served in Africa, Asia, or Europe during Cold War Service as outlined in the following guide.”

Under **Campaign Medal** and **Qualifying Dates**, add the following after **Korea Defense Service Medal...**:

Cold War Service

Sept. 2, 1945 – Dec. 26, 1991”

Service in Africa, Asia, or Europe, or its territorial waters for not less than 60 consecutive days.

M-2

Recommended by National Bylaws Study Group
Proposed by the Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief

ARTICLE I – MEMBERS

Sec. 101 – Eligibility.

Amend Sec. 101 - Eligibility., Manual of Procedure, under **Campaign Medal** and **Qualifying Dates**, add the following before **Combat Infantry Badge & Combat Medical Badge...**:

Purple Heart

Aug. 7, 1782 – Open”

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.”

M-4

Proposed by Department of Georgia

ARTICLE I – MEMBERS

Sec. 101 – Eligibility.

Amend Sec. 101 - Eligibility., Manual of Procedure, by adding the following at the end of the section:

“The following individual military medals for valor in combat have been recognized as meeting the medal requirements of membership:

Medal of Honor

Distinguished Service Cross

Army

Navy Cross

Navy, Marine Corps

Air Force Cross

Air Force

Coast Guard Cross

Coast Guard

Silver Star

Bronze Star

Prisoner of War Medal

Individual medals that are distinguished with the “V” device for valor in combat and individual medals that are distinguished with the “C” device for performance in combat meet the medal requirements of membership.”

M-5

Proposed by Department of Georgia

ARTICLE I – MEMBERS

Sec. 109 – Right of Appeal.

Amend Sec. 109 - Right of Appeal., Manual of Procedure, under **Appeals to the Department Commander.**, in the third paragraph, by replacing the last sentence with the following:

“The Department Commander shall provide a written decision within thirty (30) days.”

M-6

Proposed by Department of Georgia

ARTICLE I – MEMBERS

Sec. 109 – Right of Appeal.

Amend Sec. 109 - Right of Appeal., Manual of Procedure, under **Appeals to the Commander-in-Chief.**, in the third paragraph, by replacing the last sentence with the following:

“The Department Commander shall provide a written decision within one-hundred twenty (120) days.”

M-7

Proposed by Department of Wisconsin

ARTICLE II – POSTS

Sec. 218 – Officers and Chairmen, Duties and Obligations.

Amend Sec. 218 – Officers and Chairmen, Duties and Obligations., Manual of Procedure, under **(a) Officers.**, by removing **(9) Surgeon.** in its entirety and renumbering subsections **Officer of the Day.** as **“(9)”**, **Trustees.** as **“(10)”** and **Service Officer.** as **“(11)”**.

M-8

Proposed by Department of Georgia

ARTICLE II – POSTS

Sec. 220 – Vacancies and Removal of Elected Officers or Committee Members.

Amend Sec. 220 - Vacancies and Removal of Elected Officers or Committee Members., Manual of Procedure, by changing the Section title to read **“Vacancies and Removal of Elected Officers, Delegates, or Committee Members.”**

Under **Vacancies.**, in the last paragraph, by adding “, Delegate position,” after “elected Post office”.

Under **Removal – Post.**, in the first paragraph, first sentence, by adding “, delegate,” after “removal of an officer”. In the second sentence, add “, delegate status,” after “The member holding such office”.

M-9

Proposed by Department of Virginia

ARTICLE IV – DISTRICTS

Sec. 417 – Nomination, Election, Installation and Term of Office.

Amend Sec. 417 - Nomination, Election, Installation and Term of Office., Manual of Procedure, under **Order of Nominations and Elections.**, by adding “(unless appointed in accordance with District Bylaws)” after “Judge Advocate” and “Surgeon”.

M-10

Proposed by Department of Wisconsin

ARTICLE IV – DISTRICTS

Sec. 418 – Officers; Duties and Obligations.

Amend Sec. 418 - Officers: Duties and Obligations., Manual of Procedure, under **(a) Officers., (13) Surgeon.**, by removing the second sentence.

M-11

Proposed by Department of Wisconsin

ARTICLE V – DEPARTMENTS

Sec. 518 – Officers; Duties and Obligations.

Amend Sec. 518 - Officers: Duties and Obligations., Manual of Procedure, under **(a) Officers., (10) Surgeon.**, in the second sentence, by replacing “Post” with “District”.

M-12

Proposed by Department of North Carolina

ARTICLE VI – NATIONAL

Sec. 617 – Nomination, Election, Installation and Term of Office.

Amend Sec. 617 - Nomination, Election, Installation and Term of Office., Manual of Procedure, under **Order of nominations and elections.**, in the first sentence, by adding “Adjutant General” after “Quartermaster General”.

M-13

Proposed by Department of Oklahoma

ARTICLE VII – MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

Sec. 709 – Control of Units.

Amend Sec. 709 - Control of Units., Manual of Procedure, in the third paragraph, first sentence, by adding “and its subordinate units” after “United States”.

M-14

Proposed by the National Judge Advocate General

ARTICLE IX – DISCIPLINE

Sec. 907 - Penalties.

Amend Sec. 907 - Penalties., Manual of Procedure, by removing “(See Section 907 of the Bylaws)” next to the section title and add the following:

“The penalty imposed upon a member shall be commensurate with the offense or offenses committed and should be corrective in nature reserving the most serious penalty of membership termination for the most egregious offenses. In determining an appropriate penalty under Section 907 of the National Bylaws, the adjudicating officer, adjudicating panel, appellate official or appellate body shall consider the following factors:

1. The nature and seriousness of the offense and its relation to: (a) membership within the Veterans of Foreign Wars; (b) the member’s duties and responsibilities in an elected or appointed position in the Veterans of Foreign Wars; (c) whether the offense was intentional or technical or inadvertent; and (d) whether the offense was committed maliciously or for gain or was frequently repeated;
2. The member’s past disciplinary record within the Veterans of Foreign Wars;
3. The member’s past contributions to the Veterans of Foreign Wars and its mission including length of membership, volunteer activities and performance in appointed or elected positions;
4. Consistency of the penalty with those imposed upon other members for the same or similar offenses;

5. The impact of the offense upon the reputation of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and its members outside the organization;
6. The clarity with which the member was on notice of any rules that were violated in committing the offense or had been warned about the conduct in question;
7. Potential for the member's rehabilitation;
8. Mitigating circumstances surrounding the offense such as unusual personal issues, personality problems, mental impairment, harassment or bad faith, malice or provocation on the part of others involved in the matter; and
9. The adequacy and effectiveness of alternative sanctions to deter such conduct in the future by the member or others.

When applying these factors to determine an appropriate penalty under Section 907 of the National Bylaws, the adjudicating officer, adjudicating panel, appellate official or appellate body shall balance the needs of the Veterans of Foreign Wars to maintain good order and discipline with the membership rights bestowed upon a member by the National Bylaws. Where a lesser penalty set forth in Section 907 of the National Bylaws achieves the proper balance, the adjudicating officer, panel or appellate official or body shall choose the lesser penalty."

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE RITUAL

R-1

(Page 27)

Proposed by Department of Georgia

RITUAL

INITIATION CEREMONY (Brief Form)

Amend Chapter Title - Initiation Ceremony (Brief Form), Ritual, under **Junior Vice Commander**;, in the first paragraph, first sentence, by replacing "marine or airman" with "marine, airman or guardian".

R-2

(Page 64)

Proposed by Department of Wisconsin

RITUAL

INSTALLATION OF DISTRICT OFFICERS

Amend Chapter Title – Installation of District Officers, Ritual, in the second paragraph of **Installing Officer**;; first sentence, by removing "and to assist Post Surgeons."

R-3

(Page 106)

Proposed by Department of Massachusetts

RITUAL

FUNERAL CEREMONIES

Amend Chapter Title - Funeral Ceremonies, Ritual, by adding the following new subsection after subsection "CHAPEL SERVICE":

"CHAPEL SERVICE FOR GOLD STAR MEMBERS

We, the members of _____ Post No. _____, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, are here assembled to pay a lasting tribute of respect to our departed comrade *and Gold Star mother/father; husband/wife*. When the call of our country was heard Comrade (deceased) answered; self was

forgotten in the cause of the greater good. Bravely they marched away with the abiding faith in their God, their country and their flag.

The red of our country's flag was made redder by their heroism; the white more stainlessly pure by the motives which impelled them; and, in the starry field of our nation's glorious banner, the blue has been glorified by the service they have given for American ideals.

(Name of Comrade) further gave to the defense of our great nation the most precious and painful gift of all, that of their son/daughter; husband/wife, (announce name of the deceased child or spouse), who gave his/her life in the service and defense of the United States.

Parade rest. (Detail responds.) The Chaplain will invoke the divine blessing. (Detail hold caps over heart with right hand.)

Chaplain: (May extemporize or repeat): "O God, Father of us all, we here extend these final earthly tributes to our beloved comrade. Accept our prayers on behalf of the soul of Thy servant departed. Welcome them to Thy house to rest in peace. Look with mercy upon the loved ones bereaved by their passing. Comfort and console them through Thine own tenderness. These things we ask humbly in Thy name. Amen

(All repeat Amen. Replace caps.)

(A choir, quartet or soloist may sing "Sleep, Soldier Boy" or other appropriate song.)

Commander: One by one, as the years roll on, we are called upon to fulfill these sad duties of respect to our departed comrades.

Attention! Officers of _____ Post _____, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, you will now perform the last duties of your stations.

Junior Vice-Commander: (Faces the casket, approaches it, stands before the blue field of the casket flag in such position that their back is not toward the assembly. They fold back the blue corner of the flag to leave bare a portion of the casket. Then places the evergreen upon the casket and declares so all will hear):

"On behalf of _____ Post _____ Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, I present this evergreen tribute as a symbol of our undying love for our comrade.

(Junior Vice-Commander salutes casket and returns to their place in the line.)

Senior Vice-Commander: (Takes same position at the casket. Laying white flowers upon casket and says): "I place these white flowers as a symbol of purity upon this casket, and may each future generation emulate the unselfish devotion to duty even to the last of our comrades.

(Senior Vice-Commander salutes casket and returns to their place in line.)

Officer of the Day: (Takes same position at the casket. Laying wreath upon casket and says):

"We place this wreath as a last token of affection from their comrades-in-arms upon the casket of our departed comrade and crown their mortal dust with this symbol of victory."

(Officer of the Day salutes casket and returns to their place in line.)

Chaplain: (Placing a gold or yellow flower upon the casket and says): I place this symbol upon you in honor of the glorious sacrifice you made in life; that of your son/daughter; husband/wife in defense of our nation. With all of the admiration and reverence that we possess for your life and for the life of your child/spouse. May this most precious of tokens serve as an emblem of your grace and perseverance.

Commander: (Takes same position at the casket. Placing small Flag of the United States upon casket and says):

"On behalf of our glorious republic, for whose integrity our comrades of the Veterans of Foreign Wars enlisted and served, we place upon their casket this emblem of our country, a country whose arms are always open to

shelter the oppressed.”

(Commander then replaces folded corner of the casket flag, laying it over the evergreen, flowers, wreath, and flag symbols. Commander salutes casket and returns to their place in line.)

Chaplain: (Delivers brief address extemporaneously or repeats the following):

We come today to honor the memory of one who offered their life as a service to our nation’s cause and to our God. Proudly we remember their service. Because of men and women like our comrade, we live in a land freedom, peace and justice. May our ceremonies of today deepen our reverence for our honored comrade and friend.

We believe that our comrade is now in the hands of our Heavenly Father, the Supreme Commander and Judge of all. We lay our comrade’s body (ashes) to rest. Let us cherish their virtues and learn to imitate them. Let each of us be loyal and faithful to our remaining missions in life that we too will be able to join in that grand fraternity which is on earth and in heaven, and remains unbroken.

We realize how futile mere words are to express our deep and abiding sympathy in our loss. May we be comforted by the assurance that our comrade, friend and loved one is at rest in God’s eternal peace, and abides in a place where all burdens are lifted and there is no more sickness and pain.

Comrades, let us now pledge ourselves anew to provide support and protection for those left behind; to pick up the banner laid down by our comrade, and continue their march to face the challenges that confronts us in this life, and may our God always be our companion and guide.

Commander: This concludes our service.”

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Proposed by Department of Massachusetts

RITUAL

FUNERAL CEREMONIES

Amend Chapter Title - Funeral Ceremonies, Ritual, by adding the following new subsection after subsection “CHAPEL SERVICE”:

“CHAPEL SERVICE FOR THE GOLD STAR COMMUNITY”

Commander: Parade Rest!

We are here assembled to pay a lasting tribute of respect to our departed Gold Star father/mother; husband/wife.

When the call of our country was heard, their son/daughter; husband/wife (announce name of the deceased child or spouse) answered. He/she bravely marched away as their mother/father; husband/wife too so greatly sacrificed in their absence, knowing that they may not return.

There is no purer form of sacrifice or duty than that of those who lost a child/spouse in the service of their country.

One by one, as the years roll on, we are called upon to fulfill these sad duties of respect and reverence. We shall miss (name of departed Gold Star) and their hard attained wisdom, words of counsel, and watchful care over the memory of their son/daughter; husband/wife and in so doing, care over the memory of our nation.

Attention!

Commander: Officers, you will now perform the last duties of your stations.

Senior Vice-Commander: (Places a white flower upon the casket and says): As a symbol of purity, I place this flower upon you in remembrance of your departed life. For as much as it has pleased God to take out of this world the soul of (departed Gold Star) it shows how beautifully true is the comparison of life to this flower,

which opens in the morning, but in the evening withers away. May each future generation emulate such unselfish devotion.

Chaplain: (Placing a gold or yellow flower upon the casket and says): I place this symbol upon you in honor of the glorious sacrifice you made in life; that of your son/daughter; husband/wife in defense of our nation. With all of the admiration and reverence that we possess for your life and for the life of your child/spouse, may this most precious of tokens serve as an emblem of your grace and perseverance.

Chaplain: We have come today to honor the memory of one who offered so much to God and to our Nation's cause, that of their child/spouse. Because of fathers/mothers; husbands/wives like (name of departed Gold Star) who were willing to give so greatly and who raised God's children to love and honor Him and their country, we are therefore able to live in a land of freedom, peace, and justice. Let us cherish their virtues and learn to imitate them.

May our ceremonies today deepen our reverence for our departed friend, who we believe is now in the hands of our Heavenly Father.

We realize how futile mere words are to express our deep and abiding sympathy in your loss. May we be comforted by the assurance that our friend is at rest in God's eternal peace, and abides in a place where all burdens are lifted, where there is no more sickness, and where there is no more pain.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, who art our refuge and strength in our time of trouble, enable us we pray, to put our trust in Thee. Amen."

**RESOLUTIONS CONSIDERED BY
COMMITTEE ON FINANCE & INTERNAL ORGANIZATION
AT THE 125TH NATIONAL CONVENTION
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY**

**Resolution No. 201 (Submitted by Department of Wyoming)
FAMILY RATE**

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is committed to increasing membership to maintain a powerful voice in the nation's care of veterans; and

WHEREAS, many post Vietnam-era veterans who are eligible for the VFW are also married to eligible veterans; and

WHEREAS, these younger eligible veterans have family expenses that may prevent them from both paying the full dues amount; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, to create a family plan for eligible married veterans that is 75% of the amount that would be paid by each member individually, both in annual and lifetime memberships. (Rejected)

**Resolution No. 202 (Submitted by Department of Maryland)
INCLUSION OF MILITARY WORKING DOGS IN VFW MEMBERSHIP**

WHEREAS, military working dogs (MWDs) have served alongside members of the armed forces with unwavering loyalty and dedication, contributing significantly to the safety and success of missions; and

WHEREAS, MWDs have saved countless lives through their expertise in detecting explosives, locating enemy combatants, and providing crucial support in various operational environments; and

WHEREAS, military working dogs have displayed remarkable bravery and sacrifice in the face of danger, often placing themselves in harm's way to protect their human counterparts and fulfill their duties and distinction; and

WHEREAS, the bond between service members and their military working dogs is deeply cherished and emblematic of the camaraderie and companionship forged in the crucible of service to our nation; and

WHEREAS, recognizing the invaluable contributions and sacrifices of military working dogs aligns with the mission and values of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) to honor the service and advocate for the welfare of veterans and their families; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, shall extend membership eligibility to honorably discharged military working dogs with appropriate documentation of their service record and veterinary records confirming their status as retired service animals; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the VFW shall establish provisions for military working dogs to be recognized within VFW chapters, including ceremonies, events and memorials dedicated to honoring their service and sacrifice; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the VFW shall advocate for the welfare and well-being of retired military working dogs including support for programs and initiatives aimed at providing medical care, rehabilitation and adoption services to ensure a dignified and comfortable retirement for these deserving animals; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the VFW shall work in collaboration with relevant stakeholders including military branches, governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations to raise awareness about the contributions of military working dogs and to promote policies and legislation that uphold their rights and recognize their service to our nation; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution shall be transmitted to the National Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, urging swift and decisive action to implement the provisions outlined herein and to ensure the full integration of military working dogs into the fabric of the VFW community. (Rejected)

Resolution No. 203 (Submitted by Department of California)
MOTORCYCLE CLUBS, GROUPS AND ASSOCIATIONS

WHEREAS, prior to the adoption of Resolution No. 308 at the 111th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States August 23, 2010, motorcycle clubs, groups and associations existed as units of Posts with authority of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States; and

WHEREAS, these units be they a motorcycle club, groups or associations have been operating for periods since 2003 (in the case of VFWCA MC) under the authorization signature of John J. Senk, Jr. then Adjutant General under the command of then Commander-in-Chief Edward S. Banas, Sr., Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States; and

WHEREAS, these units have been vital to bridging the gap and enticing membership between war veterans of all eras; and

WHEREAS, these units have not caused any discredit to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States nor the sponsoring Posts; and

WHEREAS, temporary coordination between these motorcycle club, groups and associations may have and was required prior to the establishment of said clubs, groups and associations with members of the "Confederation of Clubs" for the purpose of ensuring the safety of riders and no further contact after such coordination has existed; and

WHEREAS, there is a pride in the current existence of these motorcycle club, groups and associations that has been instilled for years and has brought pride and comradeship amongst our younger members; and

WHEREAS, the name of the VFWCA MC be officially changed to the VFW MC to show national participation as ONE club. All new charters will grow from existing chartered chapters and follow the VFW Club Bylaws and VFW National Bylaws; and

WHEREAS, these units have existed and are controlled under Sections 708 and 709 of the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Bylaws; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that those motorcycle club, groups and associations that existed with authorization from the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States prior to the adoption of Resolution 308 at the 111th National Convention be allowed to continue to exist providing they adhere to the guidelines as provided for in Sections 708 and 709 of the National Bylaws. (Rejected)

Resolution No. 204 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
AMENDMENT TO SECTION 230103 OF THE CONGRESSIONAL CHARTER OF THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF
THE UNITED STATES

WHEREAS, the brave men and women of the United States military displayed distinguished service while deploying to various locations throughout Africa, Asia and Europe during the tension filled geopolitical Cold War period which extended from September 2, 1945, through December 26, 1991; and

WHEREAS, the Congressional Charter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States identifies the organization as 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, is a federally chartered corporation; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we petition Congress to amend our Congressional Charter to expand the eligibility criteria required for membership to include any veterans who served honorably in Africa, Asia or Europe or their territorial waters from September 2, 1945, to December 26, 1991, for not less than 60 consecutive days. It is recommended to Congress that a fourth subsection be added to Section 230103 to include veterans who served honorably as designated above in an expeditionary capacity of the armed forces of United States of America to deter communist advances and aggression. (Rejected)

RESOLUTIONS CONSIDERED BY
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL RESOLUTIONS
AT THE 125TH NATIONAL CONVENTION
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

Resolution No. 301 (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, one purpose of the Veterans of Foreign Wars as enumerated in our Congressional Charter is to maintain and extend the institutions of American freedom; and

WHEREAS, free and fair elections, where every vote is counted, are a bedrock of American freedom with "one person, one vote" enshrined in the Constitution by application of the Equal Protection clause of the 14th Amendment; and

WHEREAS, the Manual of Procedure of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Sections 217, 417, 517, 520, 617, and 620, all prescribe that "If there be no election on the first ballot, the name of the comrade receiving the lowest number of votes shall be dropped and so on in successive ballots until an election is made." This process being commonly referred to as "instant runoff voting," or a ranked-choice voting system that modifies plurality by repeatedly eliminating the last-place winner until only one candidate is left; and

WHEREAS, in the 2020 Presidential election, over 3 million early or mail-in votes were wasted on candidates who dropped out of the race after the ballots were cast, representing over 8% of the total votes cast, due to the "choose one" format of most ballots; and

WHEREAS, using Ranked Choice Voting for overseas service members and their families, who must vote early and by mail due to their overseas status, will ensure the votes of these citizens are counted, thereby, extending this institution of American freedom across the globe; 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 mandate the ballot states and territories must already provide to U.S. citizens to vote absentee in Federal elections be Ranked Choice Voting style ballots. (Out of order)

Resolution No. 302 (Submitted by Department of Colorado)
PROTECT THESE LIVING SYMBOLS OF AMERICAN FREEDOM

WHEREAS, “to foster true patriotism” and “to maintain and extend the institutions of American Freedom” are enumerated purposes of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, per Sec. 23012, paragraph 5 and 6 of the Congressional Charter, respectively; and

WHEREAS, “Congress finds and declares that wild free-roaming horses and burros are living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West; that they contribute to the diversity of life forms within the Nation and enrich the lives of the American people”; and

WHEREAS, “It is the policy of Congress that wild free-roaming horses and burros shall be protected from capture, branding, harassment, or death; and to accomplish this they are to be considered in the area where presently found, as an integral part of the natural system of the public lands”, as stated in the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971; and

WHEREAS, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the primary agency responsible for managing the wild free-roaming horse and burro populations, relies almost exclusively on the capture and removal of these living symbols of American Freedom to do so; and

WHEREAS, the United States of America is a nation of laws, the capture and removal of wild-free roaming horses and burros violates the spirit and stated goals of the 1971 Act meant to protect them from capture and to guarantee they remain where presently found; and

WHEREAS, it is our patriotic duty to demand that Federal agencies and their bureaucracies not undermine the will of Congress by capturing and removing the wild free-roaming horses and burros; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that Congress shall amend the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burro Act of 1971 to require the Secretary of the Interior to prioritize the implement of nonsurgical, medically safe on-range fertility controls to manage populations of wild free-roaming horses and burros where presently found over their capture and removal. (Out of order)

Resolution No. 303 (Submitted by Department of Virginia)
National Flag to Honor and Remember Those Who Died While Serving in America’s Armed Forces

WHEREAS, Veterans of Foreign Wars honors the service and sacrifice of all military service members especially those who have lost their lives in service to the Republic; and

WHEREAS, 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 the sacrifice of 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 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 Gold Star families who lost a loved on during military service; and

WHEREAS, the flag will 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 give 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 Gold Star families who have given so much to the nation. (Rejected)

**RESOLUTIONS CONSIDERED BY
COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY & FOREIGN AFFAIRS
AT THE 125TH NATIONAL CONVENTION
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY**

**Resolution No. 401 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
PRESERVE THE ALL-VOLUNTEER FORCE**

WHEREAS, despite 20-plus years war, the United States has maintained an All-Volunteer Force for more than 50 years. America’s All-Volunteer Force persists despite repeated combat tours, recruiting and retention challenges, and continues operations in an extremely dangerous and unpredictable world; and

WHEREAS, troops are worried that their concerns fall on deaf ears. They are concerned that elected and appointed officials cannot comprehend what it’s like to serve in an All-Volunteer Force that has been overtasked for decades. They are concerned about rising costs of living, reductions in quality-of-life programs, and lack of access to 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 financial resources; and

WHEREAS, worldwide commitments and challenges have increased with continuous military operations against radical forces aligned with terrorist organizations, heightened engagements in Africa, domestic activations to protect the border and assist with natural disasters, troop buildup in U.S. Indo-Pacific Command area of responsibility to counter Chinese expansion, increasing rotations to Eastern Europe to support NATO’s deterrence of Russian hostilities in Ukraine, and maintaining a continuous presence of service members fighting terrorist organizations across Southwest Asia; and

WHEREAS, recently Congress has not provided sufficient oversight and scrutiny to the use of military force and military decision-making both for domestic and foreign missions and has also demonstrated the inability to provide a stable, consistent defense budget without constant threats of arbitrary cuts. Instead, some in Congress have promoted misleading narratives about today’s service members, while projecting partisan politics onto our fighting force, disrupting an institution whose sole purpose is to protect our nation and jeopardizing the nonpartisan nature of our military; and

WHEREAS, the cumulative impact of lower pay, quality of life shortcomings, partisan politics and a higher operations tempo have had a direct impact on morale, which in combination with a more predictable and safer 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 by calling for proper oversight and scrutiny to both the domestic and foreign military mission and decision-making, investment in military quality-of-life programs, and an end of arbitrary budget caps, offering solidarity to those who volunteer to serve in a military that must protect American interests in a very dangerous and unpredictable world. (Approved)

Resolution No. 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) 2022 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military and Academic Program Year 2022-2023 Annual Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Service Academies show that reports of sexual assault and harassment still continue to rise; 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 has implemented 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 No. 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 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, new reforms to TAP require DOD and VA to grant accredited Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) access to and provide briefings on predischARGE services like disability claims assistance to TSMs; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to pass the TAP Promotion Act, to ensure every TSM is allowed to attend TAP classes with sufficient time to participate in the Benefits Delivery at Discharge program 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 No. 404 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
KEEP DEFENSE BUDGET RELEVANT

WHEREAS, America's top 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, state sponsored terrorist groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah and Houthis continue to attack civilian populations, infrastructure, and threatening to further destabilize their regions; 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 for the readiness, training, modernization, healthcare, and quality of life initiatives for the armed forces of today and tomorrow. (Approved)

Resolution No. 405 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
LINK MILITARY PAY INCREASES TO PRIVATE-SECTOR INCREASES

WHEREAS, military pay raises are linked by law to the increase in private-sector wages, as measured by the Employment Cost Index (ECI). The Administration's military pay raise request, however, can be more or less than the ECI, with Congress having the final approval; and

WHEREAS, 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 raise in FY 2023 and proposed raise in FY 2024 would be the largest pay raise in over 40 years, but still does not raise pay and benefits such as Basic Allowance for Housing to be competitive with civilian markets; 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 No. 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 No. 407 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
PRESERVE THE INTEGRITY OF THE TRICARE BENEFIT

WHEREAS, changes to Tricare this past year increased costs of both the Select and the Prime plans. 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; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, that we urge DOD to 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 nonmedical mental health counseling, reproductive health services, specialty care, and pharmacies. (Approved)

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, DOD has established precedent in awarding the AFEM for kinetic military operations supporting allied nations when individuals campaign medals have not yet been established; and

WHEREAS, United States military personnel have been assigned to eastern Europe under the operational banners of Operations Atlantic Resolve 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 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. (Rejected)

Resolution No. 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 8 post-Vietnam that include Operations Eldorado Canyon (1), Desert Storm (2), Iraqi Freedom (3), Operation Prosperity Guardian (2); 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 No. 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 No. 411 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
RECOGNITION FOR AFGHAN AND IRAQI COMBAT SUPPORT ROLES

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 No. 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 No. 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 No. 414 (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 has continued to be a partner withing the ongoing fight against terrorist groups in the Middle East; and

WHEREAS, since its establishment in 1948 Israel has been under constant threat of attacks from terrorist groups sponsored by nations that share Israels borders culminating with the Hamas attacking Israel on October 7, 2024, resulting in the death of over a thousand civilians, the imprisonment of 250 hostages committing rape and torture and violating humanitarian law by using the Palestinian people as human shields; and

WHEREAS, reestablishing peace between Israelis and Palestinians remains of strategic interest to the United States and other partners within the region; and

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 the safety of their borders and to emphasize regional stability in the Middle East, and elsewhere. (Approved)

Resolution No. 415 (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, for the past two years Ukrainians have been fighting heroically to repel Russia's war of occupation, annexation, and indiscriminate targeting of Ukrainian civilians, the likes of which have not been seen since Adolf Hitler embarked on such power-grabs in the 1930s; and

WHEREAS, the United States and European allies have been providing Western military equipment to replace Soviet era weaponry, increasing Ukraine's reliance on US manufacturers to maintain and replace weapons, munitions, and logistical equipment; and

WHEREAS, the 90% of funds provided from the United States to support Ukraine's fight against Russian aggression are paid to United States' military industries, helping to bolster the US economy; and

WHEREAS, Russia's invasion of Ukraine serves as a precursor for Russia to occupy, annex, and subjugate other free European countries that border Russia, such as Moldova, Lithuania 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 No. 416 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
DEPORTED VETERANS

WHEREAS, non-citizen United States Service members have been, and are currently being deported from the United States after serving in the United States military; and

WHEREAS, current United States Code provides that the term "national of the United States" means a citizen of the United States, or a person who, though not a citizen of the United States, owes permanent allegiance to the United States; 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 to defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; and to bear true faith and allegiance to the same, are oaths that 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, these exiled veterans face inherent barriers to accessing Veteran Affairs (VA) healthcare system as they earned during military service; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States that we urge Congress to amend the United States Code to clearly state "The following shall be nationals*, but not citizens of the United States: 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)

Resolution No. 417 (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 IJSS 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 bowel 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 multination 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 No. 418 (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, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we 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. (Approved)

Resolution No. 419 (Submitted by Department of Virginia)
ARMED FORCES EXPEDITIONARY MEDAL FOR
SUPPORT OF UKRAINE

WHEREAS, the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal (AFEM) is a military award of the United States Armed Forces, awarded to members of the U.S. Armed Forces who participate in U.S. military operations, U.S. operations in direct support of the United Nations, or U.S. operations of assistance for friendly foreign nations; and

WHEREAS, the United States has been actively supporting Ukraine with arms, training, increased forward presence, and intelligence since the March 2014 annexation of the Crimea, but especially since the February 2022 full-scale Russian invasion; and

WHEREAS, since commencement of Operation ATLANTIC RESOLVE – a continuation of the 2014 U. S.-led enhanced deterrence of Russian aggression - the U.S. has deployed an Armored Brigade Combat Team on six to nine-month rotations in Poland as a deterrent to potential further Russian aggression in eastern Europe and the Black Sea region; and

WHEREAS, as part of deployment of forces to the Baltic States, U. S. and NATO ally aircraft provide enhanced forward presence by policing the skies over NATO states in and around Ukraine; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. has deployed, and continues to further deploy, anti-air and anti-missile defense systems, such as AEGIS Ashore, to other bordering states, most recently Romania and Poland; and

WHEREAS, these batteries have already played an active role in intercepting and defeating ballistic missile launches; and

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) believes that the criteria for the AFEM have clearly been met; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the VFW urges the Secretary of Defense to authorize the award of the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal to United States military personnel, including naval forces in the Black Sea, Baltic Sea, and elsewhere as appropriate, serving in direct support of expanded U. S. or NATO presence and operations supporting the defense of Ukraine and deterrence of further Russian aggression in eastern Europe, with an award start date of 18 March 2014 and an ending date to be determined. (Approved)

Resolution No. 420 (Submitted by Department of Virginia)
DEFINITION OF “GOLD STAR FAMILY MEMBER”

WHEREAS, Title 10, United States Code (U.S.C.) § 1126 defines “next of kin” for purposes of award of a Gold Star lapel pin to survivors of servicemembers who lost their lives under certain circumstances, as defined in this statute; and

WHEREAS, Gold Star recipients are entitled to certain benefits by Federal, State, Local, and Tribal governments; and

WHEREAS, the term “Gold Star family member” is not codified in U.S.C. or the Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) thereby contributing to the use of a variety of colloquial definitions for “Gold Star family

member” among survivors’ groups, non-Federal government rules and regulations, legislation, and veteran or military service organizations; and

WHEREAS, particularly in the case of survivors’ groups, the definition may be based on organizational eligibility criteria; and

WHEREAS, the extent of these colloquial “Gold Star family member” definitions ranges from as narrow as a survivor of a servicemember killed in combat action only; to as broad as to a survivor of a servicemember who died of a service-connected injury or disease over an unspecified period following the conclusion of military service; and

WHEREAS, the absence of a statutory definition may unintentionally include or exclude survivors from benefits or recognition provided to Gold Star family members; and

WHEREAS, survivor organizations have sought how the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) defines “Gold Star family member”; and

WHEREAS, the VFW does not currently have an established definition of “Gold Star family member”; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we define a “Gold Star family member,” for purposes of Veterans Service advocacy only, as a widow, widower, parent, stepparent, child, stepchild, sibling, and stepsibling of a servicemember who died while serving on active duty or died subsequent to active duty from a service-connected injury or illness; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that said “Gold Star family member” definition in no way impacts a survivor’s status or eligibility for governmental entitlements at any level. (Rejected)

Resolution No. 421 (Submitted by Department of Florida)

SUPPORT THE DESIGNATION OF THE POW/MIA MEMORIAL AND MUSEUM TO THE NATIONAL POW/MIA MEMORIAL AND MUSEUM IN JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

WHEREAS, on May 25, 2023, Representative Aaron Bean (R-FL), along with Co-Sponsoring Representatives Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), Andre Carson (D-IN), John Rutherford (R-FL), Michael Waltz (R-FL), Neal Dunn (R-FL), Dan Webster (R-FL), Kathy Castor (D-FL), C. Scott Franklin (R-FL), Maria Elvira Salazar (R-FL), Gus Bilirakis (R-FL), Alex Mooney (R-WV), Bill Posey (R-FL), and Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL) introduced Bill H.R. 3670, the “National POW/MIA Memorial and Museum Act” to the 118th Congress; and

WHEREAS, the POW/MIA Memorial and Museum is a civic landmark and cultural institution being built in Jacksonville, Florida to honor, connect, inspire, and educate all people about the 142,000 members of the Armed Forces who have been captured as prisoners of war since World War II and the approximately 82,000 members of the Armed Forces who are currently missing in action or unaccounted for since World War II; and

WHEREAS, the POW/MIA Memorial and Museum is a unique and comprehensive project developed for the exclusive purpose of honoring former prisoners of war, those who were missing in action, those still missing and unaccounted for, and for providing a venue for families of these men and women to tell their stories; and

WHEREAS, the POW/MIA Memorial and Museum will publicize the stories of such individuals, showcasing the history of the POW/MIA logo and flag, the history of the Naval Air Station Cecil Field as a master jet base, and will serve as a reflective facility for all; and

WHEREAS, the POW/MIA Memorial and Museum will attract and educate a diverse group of people through visitor-centered, interactive, participatory exhibits, and will provide a place for educational programs, special events, and activities connecting all generations; and

WHEREAS, the memorial and museum that is, as of the date of the creation of this Resolution, being constructed on an approximately 26-acre area on POW/MIA Memorial Parkway in Jacksonville FL; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to support the passing of H.R. 3670 in the 118th Congress to officially designate the POW/MIA Memorial and Museum as the "National POW/MIA Memorial and Museum". (Out of order)

**RESOLUTIONS CONSIDERED BY COMMITTEE ON VETERANS SERVICE
AT THE 125TH NATIONAL CONVENTION
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY**

**Resolution No. 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 all staffing and maintain the integrity and enhancement of veteran entitlement programs and health care system. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 602 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
VA PHARMACEUTICAL CO-PAYMENTS**

WHEREAS, veterans, other than those with a service-connected disability rating of 50 percent or greater, those who are receiving medications for their service-connected conditions or those whose incomes fall below

the nonservice-connected pension threshold, must pay a co-payment for each 30-day supply of medications obtained through the Department of Veterans Affairs; and

WHEREAS, there have been repeated proposals to change VA pharmaceutical co-payments, placing an undue hardship on many veterans; and

WHEREAS, the increase in costs of the benefit would likely place an undue burden on veterans, limit access to earned benefits, and serve to inequitably balance the federal budget on the backs of veterans; and

WHEREAS, pharmaceuticals are part of the VA's standard health benefits package and must be provided to all eligible veterans; and

WHEREAS, VA is required by current law to charge veterans for life saving preventive medicines which are cost-free under private sector insurance and other public health care options; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we oppose increases in Department of Veterans Affairs pharmaceutical co-payments; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress must exempt preventive medicines from VA pharmaceutical co-payment requirements. (Approved)

Resolution No. 603 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
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 in association with the enactment of the PACT Act, it is now absolutely essential that VA is 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 to include TRICARE Overseas. (Approved as Amended)

Resolution No. 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, recent reports indicate that state veteran nursing homes and non-VA contracted community nursing homes operate without strong oversight from the Department of Veterans Affairs, meaning they may often set inconsistent eligibility criteria from state to state or provide care inconsistent with VA standards, resulting in inequity among veterans that are eligible to receive services; 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, through their own statements, VA 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 VA to ensure that Community Nursing Homes, state nursing homes, and contract nursing homes receive proper oversight and are accountable to the same high standards expected through the VA Healthcare System; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to establish a standard Department of Veterans Affairs and state veteran nursing home entitlement for all veterans enrolled in the VA health care system. (Approved)

Resolution No. 605 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY HEALTH CARE

WHEREAS, nearly 500,00 service members were medically diagnoses with Traumatic Brain Injuries from 2000-2023; 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 all TBIs regardless of if they are 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 No. 606 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

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 that there are nearly 1.5million veterans compensated for PTSD since September 2023; 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; and

WHEREAS, service members and veterans are increasingly prescribed psychiatric medications and more research indicates that veterans prescribed such medications may actually be at greater risk of suicide than previously known, but they are unable to provide informed consent on the newly-learned side effects such as acute withdrawal, suicidal ideation or attempts, sexual dysfunction, potential in utero harm; 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 research different treatments or practices that are most effective in helping our veterans cope with their PTSD; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that VA institute strong signatory informed consent protocols on all mental health medications, implement ethical deprescribing guidelines for veterans seeking to stop psychiatric medication, train prescribers and clinicians on the emerging harm reports on psychotropic and psychiatric drugs, and to publicize all available data to inform the growing concern of overprescription and harm in the veteran community related to psychiatric drugs. (Approved)

Resolution No. 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 2023 only 44 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 85 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 resulting in half of women veterans enrolled in VA Healthcare often seeking reproductive services (mammograms, pregnancy care, OB/GYN) in the community; and

WHEREAS, VA reported in FY 2023 that more than 600,000 women veterans are enrolled and 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 to include Women's Mental Health Services, Sexual Health Evaluation and Treatment, etc.; 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 consistency of health care and reproductive 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, to include ensuring that every VA facility has a zero tolerance policy towards sexual harassment for employees and patients. (Approved)

Resolution No. 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 No. 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 No. 610 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
FOREIGN MEDICAL PROGRAM (FMP) REFORM

WHEREAS, many veterans living overseas continue to support American interests and the American military mission as either employees of the Departments of Defense and State, or as contractors supporting these agencies – yet overseas veterans are afforded a lower standard of care from Department of Veterans Affairs, which only offers reimbursement for medical care for service-connected disabilities through its outdated Foreign Medical Program; 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 inconsistent; 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; and

WHEREAS, both DoD and VA contract with third-party administrators to deliver care to active-duty service members and military families and complete evaluative exams for the adjudication of VA service-connected disability claims, while VA care delivery remains unstructured and unpredictable; and

WHEREAS, the VFW views this lower standard of care and the antiquated mechanisms of reimbursement for veterans supporting American interests overseas as risks to national security; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge VA to revise its antiquated paper-based system and utilize Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT), to allow veterans and service providers to file claims and receive reimbursement from VA through electronic means; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge Congress to address the statutory loophole that restricts FMP to only providing reimbursement for service-connected care, offering similar care access for overseas veterans; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge Congress and VA to provide structure to the Foreign Medical Program by potentially utilizing a third-party administrator to coordinate and deliver care for overseas veterans, similar to TRICARE Overseas, VA contract compensation and pension exams, and VA's domestic Community Care programs. (Approved)

Resolution No. 611 (Commander-in-Chief)
ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD MODERNIZATION (EHRM)

WHEREAS, Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are the two largest government agencies in the United States which maintain their own medical records for the service members and veterans under their charge; and

WHEREAS, the delay of transferring medical records from DoD to VA impacts benefits veterans are eligible to receive and the transfer delay can result in lapses of medical care and the denial of veteran's benefits; and

WHEREAS, other government agencies such as the U.S. Public Health Services and Coast Guard are in the process of migrating the remainder of their medical records to Oracle Cerner, but VA's migration continues to lag caused by poor oversight and frequent leadership changes overseeing the project with failures in change management at all levels causing multiple platform deployment delays; 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 No. 612 Submitted by Commander-in-Chief
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 No. 613 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
TINNITUS AND HEARING LOSS PRESUMPTIVE COMPENSABLE
SERVICE CONNECTION

WHEREAS, veterans of the armed services who served in combat and 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; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to amend the Schedule for Rating Disabilities to provide a minimum compensable evaluation for any service-connected hearing loss for which a hearing aid is medically indicated. (Approved)

Resolution No. 614 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)

VA CLAIMS WORKLOAD

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has made significant progress in addressing claim workloads 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 legitimate doctor's 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 workload; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that Congress require Department of Veterans Affairs to accept legitimate 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)

Resolution No. 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 both within the borders of the United States and abroad; 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 at facilities within the United States and abroad; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress ensures that the Department of Defense expedites declassification efforts related to exposure events and that the Department of Veterans Affairs extends presumptive service connection to veterans suffering from conditions or illnesses found to be associated with exposure to toxic substances. (Approved)

Resolution No. 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)

Resolution No. 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 No. 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 No. 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 that the VFW calls “Claim Sharks” preying on VA beneficiaries by illegally charging exorbitant fees that clearly violate federal statutes and regulations; and

WHEREAS, these non-accredited entities have lobbied congress attempting to pass legislation that would fundamentally dismantle the basic consumer protections offered through VA accreditation and legalize predatory fee structures contrary to well-established veteran consumer protection standards to the detriment of all 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 by-pass the VA accreditation process and monetize the wartime illnesses and injuries of our veterans; 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)

Resolution No. 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 and timely adjudication of VA claims by obtaining all pertinent records when claims are initially processed and ensuring the Board expeditiously and ethically discharges its pending workload without arbitrary bureaucratic hurdles; 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 No. 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; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide updates to the VSO community providing the status of proposed and final rules whenever there are significant delays in the rule making process. (Approved)

Resolution No. 622 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
FAIR AND FAVORABLE EFFECTIVE DATES

WHEREAS, by regulation VA assigns effective dates for disability compensation based on the date the entitlement arose and can be as early as the day following separation from active service if the claim is submitted within one year of separation; and

WHEREAS, if a claim is not submitted within one year following separation from active service, VA assigns effective dates based on the date entitlement arose or the date VA receives a claim for disability compensation, whichever is later; and

WHEREAS, veterans regularly suffer from disabilities and diseases for years prior to filing a claim for compensation due to myriad reasons, resulting in lost compensation from the government; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that we urge Congress pass veteran-centric legislation granting effective dates based on when the entitlement arose, regardless of the date a claim is received by VA. (Approved)

Resolution No. 623 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
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 as 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

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 No. 624 (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

WHEREAS, 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 No. 625 (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 safe and affordable housing for veterans and their families, 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 No. 626 (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 stipends for books, electronic devices such as laptops and tablets, instructional support applications 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 No. 627 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
VETERAN READINESS AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

WHEREAS, the period of eligibility for Department of Veterans Affairs Veteran 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 No. 628 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
SUPPORT VETERANS EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars recognizes that it is in the best interest of our nation to have a strong and viable veterans employment and training system; and

WHEREAS, Congress has recognized that veterans of all eras, especially recently separated service members and veterans with service connected disabilities find it difficult to obtain meaningful employment and careers; and

WHEREAS, while there are certain employment and educational programs in place for veterans such programs must have a proactive, long-term career focus; and

WHEREAS, programs designed to encourage federal employment of veterans, assist veterans in finding employment in their communities, and encourage federal contractors to hire veterans demand reasonable funding and responsible oversight to ensure success; and

WHEREAS, state agencies who receive federal funding are not held to the same veteran hiring standards as the federal government; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support viable and effective veterans employment and training systems, such as the Jobs for Veterans State Grant program and other Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Service programs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge Congress to improve and enforce federal veteran-hiring mandates for contractors who do business with the federal government as outlined in Title 38 USC 4212; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that federal veteran hiring initiatives and programs must be held accountable for the effectiveness of the services provided and funding should be adjusted to reflect abilities in creating long-term meaningful careers for veterans, and state agencies that receive federal funding must be held to the same standards and report to Congress on the success of veteran hiring initiatives. (Approved)

Resolution No. 629 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
VETERAN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

WHEREAS, government reports consistently indicate that many federal agencies fail to reach their three-percent contracting goal for disabled veterans; and

WHEREAS, many veterans and disabled veterans lack access to the necessary capital to invest in small business opportunities; and

WHEREAS, the federal government has failed to deliver adequate tools to veterans, offering the opportunity to fulfill the three-percent federal contracting mandate; and

WHEREAS, the Small Business Administration remains underfunded and understaffed to fulfill its mission of establishing and maintaining robust veterans' programs; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that Congress expand entrepreneurial education and networking programs for veterans via veterans small business centers and other entrepreneurship programs funded through the Small Business Administration; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress expand veteran's and disabled veteran's access to capital by expanding direct loan programs through the Small Business Administration; but such programs should never come at the expense of other earned veterans' benefits; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress hold Department of Veterans Affairs accountable for its duty to properly verify veteran entrepreneurs to help achieve the federal government's three-percent veterans contracting goal. (Approved)

Resolution No. 630 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
UNDERSERVED VETERANS

WHEREAS, as our nation has become more diverse, so too has 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, the demographic of the United States is everchanging resulting in the need to remain fluid to ensure that all veteran demographics can access VA benefits relevant to their needs; and

WHEREAS, VA does not have sufficient data to fully understand the barriers certain veterans face and determine whether certain veteran demographics are underserved; 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 No. 631 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
CONSUMER PROTECTIONS FOR VETERANS

WHEREAS, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) reports that fraudulent and predatory activities affecting service members, veterans, and their families are on the rise; and

WHEREAS, predatory companies use a plethora of discreditable tactics ranging from high-interest auto and payday loans to phishing scams and identity theft; and

WHEREAS, predatory companies and bad actors prey upon individuals that are known to have financial savings, stable income, or consistent government entitlements such as disability compensation and social security benefits; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to pursue legislation criminalizing unscrupulous business practices and fraudulent scams that prey upon service members, veterans, and their families; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the Department of Justice to pursue criminal charges and convictions when deplorable business practices and scams are identified. (Approved)

Resolution No. 632 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
EXPAND VETERAN TREATMENT COURTS

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 No. 633 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
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)

Resolution No. 634 (Submitted by Department of New Jersey)
SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE FOR SURVIVING FAMILY MEMBERS OF VETERAN SUICIDE

WHEREAS, the mental health crises that veterans face from various service endeavors, resulting in suicide, whose only resolution is programs that are reactive; and

WHEREAS, family members and caregivers affected by veteran suicide whose support is provided through unrelated and underfunded services; and

WHEREAS, Suicide is very often a Service related; and

WHEREAS, the need for this resolution to elevate national support and garner the attention of federal legislators; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we petition Congress to enact legislation which would provide support and assistance for surviving family members to include a review of all eligible benefits, bereavement counseling, career counseling and job placement assistance for next of kin of covered veterans who are deceased as the result of suicide. (Approved as Amended)

Resolution No. 635 (Submitted by Department of Michigan)
GOVERNMENT HEADSTONES

WHEREAS, VA Form 40-1330 of August 2022, item # 16 describes periods of War Service that were defined by congress that are optional, to include a box for OTHER; and

WHEREAS, the designated War Service Period is used by VA even if the deceased veteran did not serve in the actual place of war, country or geographical area, and

WHEREAS, the instructions for VA Form 40-1330 do not currently provide an option for era of service when service was not performed in the actual place of war, and

WHEREAS, VA policy does provide for specific country of war service such as Afghanistan and Iraq if the individual actually served in that country; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we petition the Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemetery Administration, to amend the instructions for VA Form 40-1330 and the implementing policies, to allow for the option of "Era" to be inscribed following the inscription of any period of

war that is listed in item # 16, if the individual did not serve in the actual place of war, without additional inscription charge. (Approved)

Resolution No. 636 (Submitted by Department of Michigan)
TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY AND POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER PROGRAM

WHEREAS, according to the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Public Health estimates in January 2014, 2.6 million service members who deployed to support Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and Operation New Dawn (OND), 1,724,058 have left active duty and are eligible for VA health care, of which 998,004 have received VA health care; and

WHEREAS, according to the 2008 RAND Corporation Report an estimated cost to be \$27,260 to \$32,760 per case for mild TBI (mTBI); and

WHEREAS, it is estimated 877,450 TBI, PTSD invisible brain wounded Veterans annual economic impact is \$118.1 billion, \$4.7 trillion over a 40 year lifespan, and all can be HBOT treated for less than ½ of 1 percent of the lifetime cost; and

WHEREAS, according to DEA.GOV website, the VA distributed over \$47 million in opioid medications through their Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacies (CMOPs) to TBI/PTSD veterans from 2006 to 2014 which resulted in VA accounting of 679,376 Opioid Use Disorders Veterans in the 4th Qtr 2012; and

WHEREAS, an estimated 146,000 Veteran suicides (20 per day) have occurred since 2003 without any significant improvement in the suicides per year and an estimated 109,000 opioid deaths; and

WHEREAS, RAND research found about 19 percent of returning service members report they experienced possible traumatic brain injury while deployed, with an additional 7 percent reporting both a probable brain injury and current PTSD or major depression; and

WHEREAS, the “signature Wounds” of Iraq and Afghanistan are Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); and

WHEREAS, mental Disorders are the second largest frequency of diagnoses among returning OEF/OIF/OND service members which are currently estimated at 50.7 percent; and

WHEREAS, in 2007, VA established a TBI/PTSD Clinic Reminder in VA’s electronic medical record for any new patient to identify veterans that need additional screening for a possible TBI or PTSD diagnosis; and

WHEREAS, per the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008, Public Law 110-181, Section 1704(d), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) maintains the VA Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Veterans Health Registry that includes information about veterans who served in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), or Operation New Dawn (OND) and the report is the only VA Registry which is NOT public domain and available to Veterans and VSO; and

WHEREAS, a total of 1,474,152 OEF/OIF/OND veterans have taken the VA TBI Screen and 25.1% have qualified for the TBI Registry as stated in the VA July 2022 VA TBI Veterans Health Registry Report or an estimated 370,012 TBI veterans; and

WHEREAS, VA has screened and diagnosed hundred of thousands of veterans with TBI/PTSD and continues to have several challenges in the proper diagnosis and treatment of TBI and PTSD because of the overlap of symptoms; and

WHEREAS, according to VA, the overlapping symptoms between mild TBI and PTSD are headaches, dizziness, fatigue, and noise/light intolerance, re-experiencing, avoidance and emotional numbing; and

WHEREAS, currently, there are not any definitive FDA approved medical treatments for TBI and providers/clinicians use therapy and medications to treat the symptoms off label; and

WHEREAS, evidence-based treatments for PTSD include Cognitive Processing Therapy, Prolonged Exposure Therapy, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, as well as medication management; and

WHEREAS, 21 clinical HBOT IRB trials have been completed since 2007 demonstrating the safety and efficacy of HBOT for mild TBI in medical peer reviewed and published articles; and

WHEREAS, an estimated 12,500 TBI veterans have been successfully treated over the past 15 years in over 150 private and independent clinics across the country; and

WHEREAS, HBOT has been shown to eliminate suicidal ideation; and

WHEREAS, VA's Veteran Health Administration has several different research offices involved in studying TBI/PTSD including: VA Office of Research and Development, TBI Centers of Excellence, National Center for PTSD, Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Centers, War Related Illness and Injury Study Center, and Office of Public Health Environmental Epidemiology Service Office but lacks central oversight for management of all of the different research studies and trials through the current decentralized research model; and

WHEREAS, the textbook of Military Medicine, Part 1, Volume 5, 1990 Edition, page 313, recommends for veterans with "Blast Exposure" and evidence of "Intracerebral Air" have Definitive Therapy in Hyperbaric Chamber who's military textbook medicine is not currently being followed by the DOD or VA; and

WHEREAS, ten states (OK, TX, IN, AZ, KY, FL, NC, WY, MD, VA) have HBOT enacted legislation with the cumulative states funding more than \$30 million for HBOT treatment of TBI/PTSD veterans; and

WHEREAS, VA conducted a study on Risperidone, a second generation antipsychotic, which is not approved by the FDA for use in treating PTSD; and

WHEREAS, researchers of the study concluded that Risperidone did not improve PTSD symptoms but had several negative side effects which included weight gain, sleepiness and increased saliva in the mouth; and

WHEREAS, researchers in the study concluded that in FY 2010, VA treated 86,852 veterans for PTSD, of which 20 percent were prescribed this off-label and ineffective medication, and currently the only antidepressants and serotonin reuptake inhibitors such as sertraline and paroxetine are currently approved for treatment; and

WHEREAS, veterans that have participated in past DOD/VA TBI/PTSD research studies have not always been properly informed that they participants in the study and not given a disclosure of the effects of any treatment they may be receiving through a study; and

WHEREAS, additionally, the TBI/PTSD committee in their charge found several new innovative treatments for TBI/PTSD which include HBOT and Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy that have not been prioritized for clinical studies to determine if they are evidence-based treatments; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to provide funding to DOD and VA for innovative TBI and PTSD treatments currently used in the private sector, such as HBOT in those ten states (OK, TX, IN, AZ, KY, FL, NC, WY, MD, VA) who have enacted HBOT legislation or resolutions and other non-pharmacological treatments; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge Congress to increase the budgets of DOD and VA to improve the HBOT treatments available across all states, screening diagnosis such as FDA approved Right Eye and FDA cleared Brain Scope, and treatment of TBI/PTSD as well as provide oversight over DOD/VA to develop joint collaboration between DOD/VA and the private and public HBOT research and medical treatment communities of IRB clinical trial research already completed; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that DOD/VA both establish single offices for their agency's research and serve as a clearinghouse to track all DOD or VA research, and that all DOD/VA individual research programs and activities coordinate and provide monthly and as needed updates on research activities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that service members and veterans who participate in DOD/VA TBI/PTSD research studies are properly informed and give their consent to be included in the study as well as be provided with a disclosure of any negative effects of treatment; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that DOD/VA accelerate research efforts to properly diagnose brain wounds and develop evidence-based treatments for TBI/PTSD, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars urge Congress to exercise oversight over DOD/VA to ensure service members and veterans are only prescribed evidence-based treatments for TBI/PTSD and not prescribed off-label and non-FDA approved medications or treatments for TBI/PTSD. (Rejected)

Resolution No. 637 (Submitted by Department of Georgia)
VA HOME LOAN CORRECTION

WHEREAS, the VA home loan guarantee program was created through the *Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944*, enabling veterans since World War II to purchase homes without a down payment, making homeownership more accessible to those who served in the military; and

WHEREAS, some veterans were denied use of their VA home loan benefits due to segregation practices, discrimination of minorities and women, and a lack of accurate information provided to all veterans from World War II and after; and

WHEREAS, for veterans who did not have the opportunity to use the home loan, this impacted generational wealth-building for the families affected; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to enable veterans from World War II and after, who were unable or prohibited from using their VA home loan benefit, to be able to transfer their benefit to their descendants; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Congress and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs provide the VA home loan benefit to the descendants of deceased veterans from World War II and onward who were unable or prohibited from using the benefit while alive. (Approved)

Resolution No. 638 (Submitted by Department of Illinois)
RECOGNIZE PRESUMPTIVE CONDITIONS FROM FT MCCLELLAN, AL

WHEREAS, Fort McClellan, located in Anniston, Alabama, became an Army installation in 1917. After World War II, it was home to the Chemical Corps and Chemical Weapons School for the U.S. Army until the base closed in 1999. In 1953, Fort McClellan conducted "Operation Top Hat," which used military personnel to test exposure and decontamination methods that included sulfur mustard and nerve agents. In 1962, Fort McClellan added the Biological Radiological Agency; and

WHEREAS, from 1929 to 1971, a Monsanto chemical plant operated south of Fort McClellan in Anniston. Airborne polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) from the plant entered into the environment, and the surrounding community was exposed. In 2003, Monsanto Chemical settled a class action lawsuit with more than 200,000 residents of Anniston for more than \$700 million; and

WHEREAS, although the base closed in 1999, the 2005 National Academy of Medicine report, Contaminants in the Subsurface: Source Zone Assessment and Remediation, recognized that both the groundwater and soil were contaminated. There were 67 different disposal sites on Fort McClellan containing volatile organic compounds (VOCs), trichloroethylene (TCEs), PCBs, semi volatile organic compound (SVOCs), pesticides, explosives, heavy metals (Pb), unexploded ordinance (UXO), radioactive sources and non-stockpile chemical materials; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has recognized the toxic chemicals used at Fort McClellan, noting that potential exposures could have included, but are not limited to, the following: Radioactive compounds (cesium-137 and cobalt-60) used in decontamination training activities in isolated locations on base. Chemical warfare agents (mustard gas and nerve agents) used in decontamination testing activities in isolated locations on base. Airborne PCBs from the Monsanto plant in Anniston; and

WHEREAS, the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act, signed into law in August 2022, requires the VA to conduct an epidemiological study on the health trends of veterans who served at Fort McClellan at any time during the period beginning January 1, 1935, and ending May 20, 1999; and

WHEREAS, although the 2005 National Academy of Medicine report identifies hazardous toxins in the soil and water and VA acknowledges specific toxic exposures at Fort McClellan, VA does not concede these toxic exposures for those who served there. This requires veterans seeking VA disability claims for illnesses or diseases related to those exposures to prove their individual toxic exposures at Fort McClellan; and

WHEREAS, this large-scale and long-term epidemiological study will potentially generate evidence on the positive association between Fort McClellan exposures and health conditions. However, it will be years before the study is completed, which means veterans suffering from negative health impacts will be waiting years for possible presumptive diseases to be recognized by VA; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to establish a concession of exposure for all veterans who served at Fort McClellan. This should include all of the toxins listed in the 2005 National Academy of Medicine report and those VA has acknowledged. This will remove the burden of veterans having to prove their exposures to at Fort McClellan and ease their ability to establish direct service connection in lieu of waiting years for potential presumptive diseases; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs and the work group to include Fort McClellan as one of the research activities to expedite actions in establishing presumptive diseases. The PACT Act requires the creation of the Toxic Exposures Research Work Group to research and study toxic exposures and associated negative health impacts. (Rejected)

Resolution No. 639 (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, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we want to ensure that the issue of veteran homelessness remains a priority for both the Administration and Congress; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, 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. (Rejected)

Resolution No. 640 (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, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to support and increase the availability of high-quality gender-specific services at the VA; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge the VA to ensure that every VA facility has a zero tolerance policy towards sexual harassment for employees and patients. (Rejected)

Resolution No. 641 (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 No. 642 (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. (Rejected)

Resolution No. 643 (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, 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. (Rejected)

Resolution No. 644 (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, 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 No. 645 (Submitted by Department of South Dakota)
URGE CONGRESS TO SUPPORT THE MAJOR RICHARD STAR ACT

WHEREAS, reform to military retirement and disability compensation rules for combat-injured troops is long overdue; and

WHEREAS, Over 50,000 military retirees with significant combat-related injuries must unfairly forfeit every dollar of earned retirement pay for every dollar they receive in disability compensation; and

WHEREAS, combat-injured veterans and their families should NOT be financially punished for injuries veterans sustained in combat; and

WHEREAS, military retirement pay is a benefit earned for vested years of service to our great nation, while service-connected disability pay is awarded to compensate for reduced earning potential due to lifelong injuries and illnesses incurred while in military service; and

WHEREAS, combat-injured veterans and their families should NOT be forced to choose between either the military retirement they have earned or the disability compensation they are authorized for their injuries; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support the immediate passage of the Major Richard Star Act and urge our Federal Legislators to support its passage either as a stand-alone bill or as an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act. (Rejected)

Resolution No. 646 (Submitted by Department of Colorado)
AUTOMATICALLY GENERATE CLAIMS UPON DIAGNOSIS

WHEREAS, the Veterans Administration automatically presumes that certain disabilities were caused by military service because of the unique circumstances of a specific Veteran's military service, as established by law or regulation; and

WHEREAS, a service-connected disability entitles a veteran to healthcare provided by the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and compensation from Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA); and

WHEREAS, the Veterans Health Administration and the Veterans Benefits Administration currently have the capacity to share information via a corporate flash system; and

WHEREAS, corporate flashes are claimant-specific indicators which represent an attribute, fact, or status that is unlikely to change; and

WHEREAS, veterans often do not understand the difference between VHA and VBA, nor the difference between receiving medical treatment for a service-connected disability and receiving compensation; and

WHEREAS, the current system for veterans to apply for disability compensation for a service-connected condition can be burdensome and confusing; and

WHEREAS, the veterans routinely are diagnosed with and receive care for a condition known to be on a presumptive list by the Veterans Health Administration; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to amend The Sergeant First Class (SFC) Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act to require the VHA to notify the VBA upon the diagnosis or treatment of any condition that appears on any presumptive list; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Veterans Benefit Administration shall be required to initiate a claim for compensation on behalf of the veteran who received said diagnosis or treatment, or the veteran's surviving spouse. (Rejected)

Resolution No. 647 (Submitted by Department Colorado)
REQUIRE CIVILIAN HEALTH AND MEDICAL PROGRAM
OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERAN AFFAIRS (CHAMPVA) ACCEPTANCE

WHEREAS, CHAMPVA is a health benefits program in which the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) shares the cost of covered medical care services and supplies with spouses, children, survivors, and certain caregivers of veterans who meet eligibility criteria under 38 U.S.C. 1781¹; and

WHEREAS, those eligible for CHAMPVA coverage include the spouse or widow(er) and the children of a Veteran who is rated permanently and totally disabled due to a service-connected disability, OR was rated permanently and totally disabled due to a service-connected condition at the time of death, OR died of a service-connected disability, OR died on active duty, and these dependents are not otherwise eligible for Department of Defense TRICARE benefits; and

WHEREAS, beneficiaries² enrolled in a Veteran family member program – CHAMPVA, Spina Bifida Health Care Benefits Program, and the Children of Women Vietnam Veterans Health Care Benefits Program – administered by the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Integrated Veteran Care (IVC) have the flexibility to choose their own provider, as the program does not have a provider network; and

WHEREAS, all hospitals that participate in Medicare, and hospital-based health care professionals who are employed by, or contracted to, such hospitals are required by law³ to accept the VHA IVC allowable amount for inpatient hospital services; and

WHEREAS, all other health care professionals are NOT required to accept CHAMPVA. For the beneficiaries, who have the flexibility to choose their own provider, this means that when the medical provider does not accept assignment, the cost will include not only the deductible amount but also their share of the CHAMPVA determined allowable amount, and any charges over the allowable amount; and

WHEREAS, finding a provider that accepts assignment, or seeing a provider that does not accept assignment, puts an undue burden on the beneficiary when trying to access the care that was earned through the sacrifices made by the sponsoring veteran; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to amend the necessary statutes to mandate ALL medical providers and facilities that accept Medicare to accept all beneficiaries enrolled in a Veteran family member program, including CHAMPVA. (Approved)

References:

¹<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2022-title38/pdf/USCODE-2022-title38-partII-chap17-subchapVIII-sec1781.pdf>

²<https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/dependents/locate-provider.asp>

³<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-42/chapter-IV/subchapter-G/part-489/subpart-B/section-489.25>

Resolution No. 648 (Submitted by Department of Pennsylvania)
VETERAN SUICIDE AWARENESS

WHEREAS, the mental health crises that veterans face from various service endeavors, resulting in suicide, whose only resolution is programs that are reactive; and

WHEREAS, family members and caregivers affected by veteran suicide whose support is provided through unrelated and underfunded services; and

WHEREAS, Suicide is very often Service related: and

WHEREAS, there is a defined need for this resolution to elevate national support and garner the attention of federal legislators; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S., that we petition Congress to enact legislation which would provide veteran suicide awareness through The Veterans Administration and instituting support and assistance for surviving family members to include a review of all eligible benefits, bereavement counseling, career counseling and job placement assistance for next of kin of covered veterans who are deceased as the result of suicide. (Rejected)

COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL BYLAWS, MANUAL OF PROCEDURE AND RITUAL

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Arizona	Nedra Sealey	9972
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Arkansas	Terry Callahan	9095
Arkansas	Darrell Darner	1674
Arkansas	Jerry Hulsey	2952
Arkansas	Christine Oldham	4548
California	Daniel Jennings	3173
Colorado	John Keene	1
Connecticut	Robert Bailey	10153
Connecticut	Richard DiFederico	7330
Delaware	Stephen McGuire	475
Delaware	Mark Newman	3238
Europe	Stanley Allgood	10312
Europe	Derrek Gibson	12139
Europe	Peter Mascetti	27
Europe	Bobby White	8862
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Georgia	Kevin Daniel	7402
Georgia	Dwayne Kilbourne	5408
Georgia	Jason Nichols	7720
Georgia	Cindra Otto	4583
Georgia	Patsey Schreiber	8385
Georgia	Alex Williams	4706
Georgia	Kimberly Williams	12164
Georgia	David Worthen	8385
Hawaii	Chelsea Mack	3830
Hawaii	Ronald Schaedel Sr	10276
Idaho	Kenneth Babcock	7137
Idaho	Bobby Tettleton	9036
Illinois	Eugene Blackwell	311
Illinois	Jonathan Cooper	8821
Indiana	Adam Bethard	6128
Iowa	Paul Miller	6414
Kansas	Brandon Kultgen	3111
Kansas	Kenneth Romine	56
Kentucky	Merlin SESCO	3769
Louisiana	Robert Lovergne Jr	3750
Maine	Chris Armstrong	9437
Maryland	Albert Argel	5471

Maryland	Dominador Carreon	5471
Maryland	Willie Evans	9619
Massachusetts	Paul Spera	144
Massachusetts	Jay Humphreys	620
Michigan	Derek Braun	2780
Minnesota	Scott Bill	1782
Minnesota	Duane Hermanson	4452
Minnesota	Daniel Meyer	8459
Mississippi	Rickey Hosey	3036
Missouri	Quentin Carroll	7356
Missouri	Tommy McLerran	8828
Missouri	Eric Sullivan	5789
Missouri	Charles Williams	2657
Montana	Jack Hawley	1087
Montana	James Layton	4067
Nevada	David Sousa	3396
New Jersey	Michael Boll	2433
New Jersey	Jay Boxwell	335
New Jersey	Brian Green	12165
New Jersey	Anthony Lione	2342
New Jersey	Dennis Sampson	6063
New Jersey	Brian Wiener	6964
New Jersey	Norman Wiener	6964
New Jersey	David Young Jr	5579
New Mexico	Vincent Lawrence	7686
New Mexico	John Archuleta	5890
New York	Robert Barnhart	686
New York	Michael Burke	686
New York	Thomas Howard	982
New York	Daniel Kell	53
North Carolina	Timothy Woods	5352
Ohio	Jose Torres	1662
Ohio	John Wiley	5803
Oklahoma	Dannie Bates	8384
Oklahoma	Erica Traxler	5263
Oklahoma	Randy Traxler	5263
Oregon	Allen Anderson	4273
Pacific Areas	Laurence Lyons	8180
Pacific Areas	Warren Maxson	8180
Pennsylvania	James Brown	5958
Pennsylvania	John Getz	3376
Pennsylvania	Henry Mannella	7632
Rhode Island	Joe Patrick	916
South Dakota	Lonny Potts	8530
Tennessee	Richard Farrer	12206
Tennessee	Kimberly King	10904
Tennessee	Brian Walker	5066
Texas	Anson Booker	3892
Texas	Daniel West	3413
Vermont	Samuel Haskins	1034
Virginia	Jeffrey Dombroff	9835
Virginia	Matthew Mayer	12225
Virginia	Kenneth Wiseman	1503

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West Virginia	Todd Kingsbury	896
Wisconsin	Cory Geisler	721
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Wisconsin	Michele Rathke	1638
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Wisconsin	Nicholas Webster	10911

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Connecticut	Kenneth Lukowski	7330
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Delaware	Marc Garduno	3238
Delaware	Fulton Loppatto	7234
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Europe	Mark Karraker	12139
Europe	Anthony Wallent	27
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Georgia	Ronald Cowan	12002
Georgia	James Davis	12002
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Illinois	Timothy O'Donnell	976
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Kansas	Karey Haukom	3115
Kansas	John Muckelbauer	3712
Kentucky	Robert Daugherty	1298
Maine	Jared Sawyer	6859
Maine	Chad Steward	7865
Maryland	Paul Phillips	5633
Maryland	Stephen Thomas	8674
Massachusetts	Sterling Elmer	872
Massachusetts	Robert Hardy	529
Massachusetts	Patrick Johnson	2547
Michigan	Peggy Hann-Miles	2496
Minnesota	Maria Maldonado	1791
Minnesota	Michael Meyer	3723
Mississippi	Stephan Trochessett	2132

Missouri	Clifford Branch	10350
Missouri	James McKay	2365
Montana	Wendy Silvera	12112
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Nebraska	Michael Kunce	131
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New Mexico	Mack Dyer	12184
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Pennsylvania	Ruth Fairchild	315
Pennsylvania	Michael McLane	7069
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South Dakota	Rick Hamm	3442
South Dakota	Barbara McKean	3298
Tennessee	James Haney	5146
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Texas	James Nier	8919
Texas	Ray Sanchez	8587
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Wisconsin	Robert Buehler	1393
Wisconsin	Gregory Roth	8338

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Arkansas	Terry Ham	2259
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Colorado	Jesse Eastburn	1
Connecticut	David Greene	10004
Connecticut	Kenneth Hartline	1265

Connecticut	Mario Richards	1265
Delaware	James Greenplate	475
Europe	David Hachey	12139
Florida	Chris Gates	3282
Georgia	Kelli Kelley	2667
Hawaii	Randy Grant	3292
Idaho	David Frei	4902
Idaho	Thomas Black	63
Illinois	John McGlynn	5975
Illinois	Kyna Simpson	311
Indiana	Keith Rohloff	9297
Indiana	Harold Havlin	9982
Indiana	William Thien	3281
Indiana	David Fradenburg	1108
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Iowa	Russell Saffell	9127
Iowa	Bradley Whitmore	9127
Kansas	Danielle Springall	56
Kansas	Lee Hursey	3115
Kentucky	Mark See	3205
Louisiana	Mikal Rogers	1809
Louisiana	Mitchell Cota	7286
Maine	Michael Mc Innis	7997
Maine	James Manter	3335
Maryland	Joseph Allen	3285
Maryland	Daniel Puzon	5471
Massachusetts	Patrick Logue	8819
Michigan	Scott Holmes	5319
Michigan	David Martin	2144
Michigan	Garrett Dickey	2144
Michigan	David Prohaska	4434
Minnesota	Edward Keogh	5340
Minnesota	Charles Hawkins	9625
Minnesota	Barry Henriksen	1782
Mississippi	John Floyd	9573
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Missouri	Ann Stanfield	2661
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Nebraska	Gary Niedbalski	2280
Nebraska	Amy Buckley	7970
Nebraska	John Baum	8221
Nevada	Jerry Bouck	12093
Nevada	Gerald Peterson	12101
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New Jersey	Kenneth Hanzl	5481
New Jersey	Filipe Oliveira	3117
New Mexico	Victoria Haddox	5890
New Mexico	Paul Golden	5890
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New York	Thomas Rabb	6472
New York	Marcello Rotunda	53
New York	Matthew Vanetten	6001
North Carolina	Perry Saunders	6018

North Carolina	Jennifer Hutt	4542
North Dakota	Wayne E Wermager	7564
North Dakota	William Tuff	7564
Ohio	Timothy Zvoncheck	3345
Ohio	Michael Riley	1069
Ohio	Christine Curry	8794
Pacific Areas	David Gley	8180
Pennsylvania	Thomas Hanzes	7599
Pennsylvania	Amy MacKenzie	3376
Pennsylvania	William Meiser	23
Pennsylvania	Larry Reece	5752
Pennsylvania	David Swanson	1132
Rhode Island	Walter Fricke	8955
Rhode Island	Eric Dukat	152
South Carolina	Ginger Graham	6740
South Dakota	Derek Besler	5860
Tennessee	John Maier	4969
Texas	Rodney Lane	1406
Utah	Tammy Flake	6395
Vermont	Michael Choquette	792
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Virginia	Beth Ford	3219
Virginia	Robert Lunn	9835
Virginia	Gloria Kenney	10654
Virginia	Todd Taylor	3103
Virginia	Alexander Thymmons	1499
Virginia	Leo Pedersen	3219
Virginia	Harold Schupska	3160
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West Virginia	Charles Laugh	6327
West Virginia	David George	1212
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Connecticut	Stanley Borusiewicz	201
Connecticut	Jim Matthews	296
Europe	Brian Flick	10692
Georgia	Lamar Pounds	658
Georgia	Dean Rakoskie	10825
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Idaho	Rockey Davis	10043
Illinois	Douglas Jameson	1739
Indiana	Larry Patch	1587
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Maine	Kenneth Smart	3108
Maine	Edward Harmon	2197
Maine	Michael Davis	1603
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Maryland	Denise Perry	6054
Maryland	Phoebe Thurman	3065
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Massachusetts	Robert Graser	1822
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Minnesota	James Tuorila	428
Minnesota	Dale Hoogeveen	1791
Minnesota	Dennis Maddox	5518
Missouri	Michael Schroeder	8045
Montana	Thomas Pouliot	10010
Montana	Matthew Walker	1507
Nebraska	Kristine Maxey	8334
Nebraska	Davin Stege	1077
Nevada	John Stroud	2313
New Hampshire	Dennis Manning	4483
New Hampshire	Leon Rideout	3041
New Jersey	Luddie Austin	12165
New York	Barbara Bishop	8645
New York	Eugene Ratigliano	420
New York	John Wenig	8645
North Carolina	Mike Baker	670
Ohio	Christian Gonzalez	5354
Oklahoma	Ron Albert	5263
Oklahoma	Frank Whitlock	577
Pacific Areas	Alexander Fores	124
Pennsylvania	Thomas Sally	5954
Pennsylvania	Steven Sellers	1620
Rhode Island	Joseph Janeiro	6342
South Carolina	Edwin Tufts	3433
South Dakota	Cynthia Christensen	2750
Tennessee	Richard Lee	2120
Tennessee	Terry Huskey	5146

Texas	Lazaro Velasquez	8932
Utah	Heath Silcox	12087
Vermont	Charles Magnant	778
Virginia	Benjamin Guinan	1503
Washington	Jason Paxton	1854
West Virginia	William White	3466
West Virginia	Adam Elder	7048
Wisconsin	Randy Engness	2204
Wisconsin	Amanda Wilson	2708
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Alaska	Daniel Luby	9365
Arizona	Tim Borland	9972
Arkansas	Marcus Davis	2242
California	Michael Croy	2924
California	Art Napiwocki	1614
California	Mark Steinberg	1525

Colorado	Mathew Cummings	6624
Connecticut	Ron Rusakiewicz	9460
Delaware	David Hilliard	475
Delaware	John Leonardo	2907
Europe	Emilio Andujar	10436
Europe	Robert Dorris	9342
Europe	Kristina Keenan	605
Florida	Jason Smith	10094
Georgia	Belinda Boldoe	12180
Georgia	James Gray	5080
Georgia	Charles Howe	660
Hawaii	Maria Togia	3391
Idaho	William Heyob	63
Illinois	Robert Bailey	7452
Illinois	Sean Conner	10009
Illinois	Joshua Seed	755
Indiana	Judy King	2695
Indiana	Kenneth Lange	10003
Indiana	Shawn Ransford	10003
Iowa	Michael Braman	3519
Iowa	Richard Davis	6414
Iowa	James Kerner	9127
Kansas	David Koopmans	3115
Kentucky	Justin Hollon	680
Kentucky	Brian Duffy	1170
Louisiana	Ronald Delaney	4588
Louisiana	Welma Jackson	3766
Maine	Jo Ann Bolduc	8835
Maine	Michael Dumont	8835
Maine	Christopher Soucy	8835
Maryland	Joseph Thornton	9619
Massachusetts	Natalie Call	6538
Massachusetts	Delray Dorsey	2498
Massachusetts	Mike Figlioli	2017
Massachusetts	Stephenie Jones	6258
Massachusetts	Andrew Robinson	6643
Michigan	Sidney Love	1370
Michigan	Scott Taylor	1075
Michigan	Chris Templeton	1669
Mississippi	Steven Organ	5395
Mississippi	James Statham	3955
Missouri	David Bozarth	257
Missouri	James Holmes	5717
Missouri	Troy Williams	1003
Nebraska	Charles Roberts	1504
Nebraska	Matthew Starkey	759
Nevada	Denise Estes	10053
New Hampshire	John Barrett	1631
New Hampshire	Monique Hashimoto	8497
New Jersey	Bob Wallace	9503
New Jersey	Robert Weiss	133
New Mexico	James Berdine	10763
New Mexico	Darrell Melon	10124

New York	Colin Anderson	53
New York	James Brooks	600
New York	Madison Fletcher	170
New York	Peter Pennelle	8645
New York	Ronald Sorrentino	1582
New York	Thomas Todaro	53
North Carolina	Tab Brown	2771
North Carolina	Bridget Lightner	7775
North Dakota	Dustin Dezotell	753
North Dakota	James Prentice	762
Ohio	Eric Drake	2595
Ohio	Steven Duncan	657
Oklahoma	James Dockemeyer	1317
Oregon	David Lowe	180
Pennsylvania	Charles Beattie	8430
Pennsylvania	Roger Decker	1718
Pennsylvania	Robert Eiler	7842
Pennsylvania	Craig Fisher	5956
Pennsylvania	Jessica King	8430
Pennsylvania	James Rice	1532
Rhode Island	Stephen Boland	4487
Rhode Island	Lance Leonaitis	8955
Rhode Island	Pat Murray	152
South Carolina	Bailey Bryant	8738
South Carolina	Dennis Hamilton	3137
South Carolina	Charles Holloway	6740
South Carolina	John Johnson	8738
South Dakota	William Barlow	3442
South Dakota	Kris Fenton	5969
South Dakota	David Huntimer	4726
Tennessee	Reginald Sims	6496
Texas	Rafael Alvarado	9186
Utah	Harley Boyles	1481
Virginia	Laurie Clay	8545
Virginia	Ryan Gallucci	3150
Virginia	Ashley Gurley	12202
Virginia	Thomas Levitt	1503
Virginia	Sheri Moore	3103
Washington	Charles Bond	7392
Washington	Jerry Herker	3386
West Virginia	Toby Heaney	629
West Virginia	David Sisler	578
Wisconsin	Mark Dykstra	1621
Wisconsin	Paul Morrison	2534
Wisconsin	Timothy Neary	6498

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NATIONAL COMMITTEE CONVENTION RULES

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Missouri	Quentin Carroll	7356