



**Department of  
South Carolina  
The American Legion**

P.O. Box 3309, Irmo, SC 29063  
Tel: (803) 612-1171  
E-mail: [dept.adjutant@sc.twcbl.com](mailto:dept.adjutant@sc.twcbl.com)  
Website: [www.scarolinalegion.org](http://www.scarolinalegion.org)



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## **SOUTH CAROLINA NEWS LINE**

**Learn to appreciate what you have before time makes you appreciate what you had.**

### **2014 Fall Conference**

At this point in time, plans for the 2014 Fall Conference at the Marriott in Columbia are being made. The hotel has notified us that the block of rooms is still available and that not many have made reservations to attend. If you plan on attending, please call the hotel and make your appropriate reservations as soon as possible. The tentative agenda is published on the Department website for review, however, it is subject to changing as programs require. Let's make this one a good conference and see how many we can get to attend. It promises to be a learning one this year. Cut-off date is **September 8** for reservations at the rate of \$89.00 per night plus tax making sure you state you are with **The American Legion**. Contact the hotel at 803-771-7000 or 800-543-6465.

### **Half-Staff Notice**

In accordance with Public Law 107-89, the President of the United States is requested to issue a proclamation (per the requirements of Flag Code section 7(m)) for the United States Flag to be displayed at half-staff for the day on Patriot Day, **Thursday, September 11**.

It is anticipated that the President will issue the proclamation; when issued the proclamation can be found on the White House website @ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions>.

## Military Pay Raise

A group representing military officers will meet Thursday with representatives from other service and veterans organization and seek a united front in opposing President Obama's recently announced 1 percent cap on 2015 troop pay raises. The Military Officers Association of America wants Congress to override Obama's decision and grant the 1.8 percent pay raise that service members would get under a federal formula.

The American Legion, which on Wednesday announced its own opposition to the President's action, wants to see a 2 percent increase for the military. "It is the least we can do, even in these trying fiscal times, to maintain a decent quality of life for our servicemembers," Legion National Commander Michael D. Helm said in a statement. Helm said 2 percent is the rate of inflation for the past 12 months, according to the federal government. "With a war in Afghanistan, boots back on the ground in Iraq, and ISIS on the loose in the Middle East, is a 1 percent salary raise really the best we can do for the men and women we expect to meet those challenges?" Helm asked.

Except for MOAA and the **Legion**, response to the 1 percent cap has so far been quiet, though Michael Hayden, director of government relations for MOAA, said believes that is linked to the timing of the announcement. "The President elected to do this just before a three-day weekend, and some folks are still on vacation at this time," Hayden said. A spokesman for the Veterans of Foreign Wars said that the group does not plan to comment on the 1 percent cap. Hayden hopes to get more groups on board on Wednesday when he meets with The Military Coalition, a 33-member organization service associations and veterans groups that he co-chairs. This is the second consecutive year that Obama, in agreement with the Defense Department, has limited the raise to 1 percent. The White House and Pentagon are trying to keep costs down, and Obama cited "serious economic conditions" as justification for the cap. Hayden said the cap "is a very difficult pill to swallow" at a time when the force is downsizing and the country remains at war. "This sends a horrific message to the troops," he said. The move is also bound to hurt military retention, he said.

The good news is that this is an election year, Hayden said, which means some lawmakers in the Senate – which has already voted for a 1 percent cap on raises – could be persuaded to take another look and override Obama's decision. The House voted for the 1.8 percent raise, but has no choice under the law but to live with Obama's decision unless the Senate does revisit its vote. "It's not a done deal, but in order to overturn this it's going to have to take a strong push by someone within the Senate," Hayden said. MOAA is now trying to find a champion in the Senate that will introduce an amendment to the 2015 budget on the floor kicking up the raise to 1.8 percent.

If that happened the amendment would be subject to a conference committee deal with the House, he said, though the House is already on the side of the 1.8 percent increase. "And then there is still an opportunity for a veto by the President," he said. If it got that far Obama would have to consider his veto in light of the November elections, Hayden said. It has been about two decades since Congress passed legislation mandating federal pay keep pace with the private sector. But a provision in the law provides wiggle room for a President to adjust the formula in the event of national emergencies and tough economic conditions.

Though President George W. Bush lowered an expected federal pay raise for civilian workers after the 9/11 attacks, military pay raises continued. But the brakes were put on these after the market crash in 2008, which led to demands reduced spending. Obama in 2010 scaled back a planned 2.4 military pay raise to 2 percent.

### **Town Hall Meeting**

The Wm. Jennings Bryan Dorn Veterans Affairs Medical Center will host an outreach fair and public town hall meeting for Veterans and their families on **September 24**. “Staff will be available at the outreach fair to provide Veterans with valuable healthcare and benefit information,” said Medical Center Director Timothy B. McMurry. “The town hall will provide a forum where we can gather important input directly from Veterans to improve our VA programs.” The outreach fair will be held 4:45 p.m. to 5:45 p.m. in the main lobby of the Medical Center (building 100). Following the fair, a town hall meeting will be held next door from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. in the Auditorium (building 5). Free event parking is available in parking lot number 1 and the overflow parking lot. “It is essential that we listen to our Veterans who use VA healthcare so we can continuously improve our services at the Dorn VA Medical Center,” added McMurry. “This public town hall will aid us in obtaining valuable feedback that ultimately translates to improved access and healthcare for our South Carolina Veterans.”

### **Transfers**

When I and the Department Commander travelled around the state delivering the new membership cards, I mentioned that National had advised that if someone wanted to transfer to your post that it was okay to write in the section where the individual signs his/her signature to write “Per telephonic approval” or something to that effect. This was brought up at the last DEC meeting and the DEC has stated that the individual’s signature was to be placed there and not as I had recommended. Therefore, any reference to the telephonic approval is not to be accepted and only the individual’s signature will be accepted here at headquarters. I apologize if this has caused any confusion pertaining to transfers and the Member Data Forms. /s/Lloyd Woods, Dept. Adjutant

### **New National Officers**

Michael D. Helm was elected national commander of the 2.4 million-member American Legion on Aug. 28, 2014 in Charlotte, N.C., during the 96th national convention of the nation’s largest veterans organization.

A U.S. Army veteran during the Vietnam War, he served with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division in Fort Bragg, N.C., and earned his Ranger tab in 1972. He has been a member of Jack Helt American Legion Post 313 at Lebanon, Neb., since 1972. Born in McCook, Neb., he grew up in Norcatur, Kansas, where he currently resides. He is a retired U.S. Postal Service rural mail carrier with more than 33 years of service.

Helm served as commander of the Department of Nebraska from 1987 to 1988 and as a national vice commander from 2003 to 2004. He also served as the national commander’s representative to the National Legislative Commission, the chairman of the National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission and the chairman of the Foreign Relations Commission.

He was Nebraska’s first Vietnam era veteran elected as department commander. Mike takes great pride in having been selected to serve as Nebraska’s official American Legion representative at the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1982.

Mike's wife Debbie is active in The American Legion Auxiliary having served as District 9 president and as the Department Junior Activities Chairwoman. They are the parents of five young Legion family members. Aaron and his wife Robie, both graduates of the United States Military Academy at West Point, N.Y.; Rebecca and her husband Jaron Cox, both graduates of Kansas State University; Jacob, a senior cadet at the U.S. Air Force Academy; Matthew, an Army ROTC cadet at Kansas State University and Timothy, a student at Decatur Community High School in Oberlin, Kansas.

Helm took the oath of office along with five other national officers. Serving as national vice commanders are Doug Haggan, Department of France; Paul O. Sanford, Department of Kansas; Richard W. Neville, Department of North Carolina; William R. Bryant, Department of Virginia; and Gerald L. Jacobs, of Wyoming. They each represent regions that cover the 50 states, District of Columbia and overseas departments of The American Legion.

National Historian Sue Mason, Long Beach, Calif.; National Sergeant-at-Arms Leon Hagan, of Beatrice, Neb.; and National Chaplain Randy Cash, Columbia, S.C., were appointed to their positions by Cmdr. Helm following the close of the national convention.

### **LIT Information**

The Legionnaire Insurance Trust is pleased to announce that online enrollment is now available for the LegionCare No Cost Accidental Death benefit. Please be sure to let your Department know about this one-of-a-kind benefit offered exclusively to Legionnaires.

LegionCare provides all Legionnaires with:

- \$5,000 in Accidental Death Coverage for covered accidents that occur if you are traveling on official Legion business.
- \$1,000 for all other covered accidents.
- 24/7 protection that covers Legionnaires at home, at work and while they are travelling away from home available for all Legionnaires in your Department.

To learn more or to sign up, please visit <http://www.thelit.com/no-cost-legioncare>.

### **New VA Burial Rule**

An announcement dated July 7, 2014 regarding New Burial Compensation Rules, new regulations effective on 7/7/2014 will now allow the Department of Veterans Affairs, (VA) to automatically pay the maximum amount allowable under law to most eligible surviving spouses more quickly and efficiently, without the need for a written application. Under former regulations, VA paid burial benefits on a reimbursement basis, which required survivors to submit receipts for relatively small one-time payments that VA generally paid at the maximum amount permitted by law. "VA is committed to improving the speed and ease of delivery of monetary burial benefits to Veterans' survivors during their time of need," said Acting VA Secretary Sloan Gibson. "The recent changes allow VA to help these survivors bear the cost of funerals by changing regulations to get them the benefits more quickly."

This automation enables VA to pay a non-service-connected or service-connected burial allowance to an estimated 62,000 eligible surviving spouses out of a projected 140,000 claimants for burial benefits in 2014. Surviving spouses will be paid upon notice of the Veteran's death using information already in VA systems. The burial allowance for a non-service-connected death is \$300, and \$2,000 for a death connected to military service. This revised regulation will further expedite the delivery of these benefits to surviving spouses, reduce the volume of claims requiring manual processing, and potentially make available resources for other activities that benefit Veterans and their survivors. For more information on monetary burial benefits, visit [www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/claims-special-burial.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/claims-special-burial.asp)

### Pro Bono Info

Lawyers4Vets - Monthly Pro Bono Veterans Legal Clinic

**Introduction:** As a service to area Veterans, the South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center has partnered with the Wm. Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center and members of the private bar to establish Lawyers 4 Vets, a Pro Bono Veterans Legal Clinic.

**Purpose:**

Lawyers 4 Vets connects low income and homeless Veterans with attorneys who provide legal advice and representation on certain issues.

**Legal Issues and Services:** The clinic will ONLY address the following topics:

- Obtaining identification (Social Security, South Carolina State ID, birth certificates)
- Child support and visitation issues (in South Carolina)
- Expungements and pardons (for convictions from South Carolina courts)
- Consumer protection
- Simple wills and healthcare power of attorney

**Eligibility:**

Veterans will be screened for eligibility, and if eligible will be given an appointment at the clinic. Lawyers 4 Vets will assist eligible Veterans regardless of military discharge status.

**Appointments:** Veterans who would like to be screened for eligibility should call the number listed below and leave a message including their name, phone number, and legal issue. The Veteran will be contacted within 2 business days by an intake volunteer who will ask the veteran a number of questions to determine if they are eligible. If the Veteran is eligible and has a qualifying legal issue, they will be given the next available appointment at the legal clinic. Appointments are required for a Veteran to receive a face-to-face meeting with a lawyer. Walk-ins will not be seen and will be directed to contact the telephone intake.

**Number to call:** Toll Free 1-877-289-6000

**Clinic Dates:** The Clinic will be held from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. on the third Thursday of each month. The 2014 Clinic dates are:

- |                      |                    |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| * May 15, 2014       | *June 19, 2014     |
| * July 17, 2014      | *August 21, 2014   |
| * September 18, 2014 | *October 16, 2014  |
| * November 20, 2014  | *December 18, 2014 |

**Where: (BY APPROVED APPOINTMENT ONLY AND SPECIFIC LOCATION PROVIDED UPON CONFIRMATION):** Wm. Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center, 6439 Garners Ferry Road, Columbia SC 29209.

**What's Happening**

**September 13, Saturday** – District #1 meeting Post #193 Chapin 9:30 refreshments 10:00 meeting

**September 16, Tuesday** – District #15 Post #212 Aiken 6:30 p.m.

**September 19-20-21 Friday-Saturday-Sunday** – Fall Conference, Columbia Marriott Hotel

**September 27, Saturday** – District #19 Post #84 Hemingway, 2333 Hemingway Hwy, 10 a.m.

**September 28, Sunday** – Gold Star Family Day. Light a luminary at dusk. See [luminaryinitiative.com](http://luminaryinitiative.com) website to honor, support and remember the families of our fallen heroes.

**Post Officer Listings**

**District and Post Commanders Please Note:** Even though you may have the same officers in the same positions for the 2014-2015 year, you should also submit a listing to department. Also, for those that have email addresses, please indicate that on the listing. Your assistance and attention to this matter will be greatly appreciated.

Proud To Serve

Lloyd H. Woods  
Department Adjutant