



**Department of
South Carolina
The American Legion**

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SOUTH CAROLINA NEWS LINE

**Once you learn how to be happy, you won't tolerate being around people
who make you feel anything less.**

**National Commander
Message**

Dear Legion Family Members and Friends

The mission to help veterans and their families was at the heart of our organization's birth nearly 100 years ago. Service above self still guides The American Legion today. Consider that during the recent American Legion Legacy Run, a record \$1 million was raised. These funds provide scholarship money for the children of service members who lost their lives on active duty since 9/11. This is one example of how The American Legion demonstrates its commitment to the families of service members. Donations to American Legion Charities also help fund Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW), Child Welfare Foundation (CWF), Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA), National Emergency Fund (NEF) and other important programs.

When I became national commander a couple of weeks ago, I announced my 4 x 4 program. One "4" stands for raising \$4 million among The American Legion Family – the Legion, Auxiliary, Sons of The American Legion and Legion Riders. The other "4" also represents 4 million – that's 4 million members of the Legion Family. The goals are well within our reach. The rewards will represent significant progress for our organization. I devised the 4 x 4 program so that all of our charitable outreach initiatives would benefit. You may have a passion to help our wounded servicemen and women, so a donation to OCW would be appropriate. Or you may want to send a contribution to a program that assists children, such as CWF, TFA or the Legacy Scholarship Fund. In any case, I am asking for your kind donations to whichever program or programs you wish to support. These programs are effective because of our volunteers. These are men and women who deliver checks to victims in disaster zones, hold fundraising events and purchase comfort items for recovering troops in warrior transition units. Without these volunteers in the Legion, Auxiliary and SAL on the front lines, our organizations would all cease to exist. To keep these programs viable, we must keep our membership strong. I am asking you to recruit all eligible veterans you meet. Invite their sons and grandsons to join the SAL. Encourage wives and daughters to join the Auxiliary. On behalf of the nation's largest and most influential veterans service organization, thank you for what you do every day on behalf of veterans, their families and young people.

Michael D. Helm
National Commander

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 was **September 17** 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. Reservations to attend need to be at Headquarters by September 12.

Disabilities Treaty

American Legion National Commander Daniel M. Dellinger called on the Senate to ratify the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). An international disability treaty inspired by U.S. leadership in recognizing the rights of people with disabilities, the CRPD creates a framework for legislation and policies around the world to improve the lives of all people with disabilities, including millions of disabled American veterans who travel abroad. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was the model for the CRPD, and the treaty echoes its values of independence and respect for persons with disabilities, as well as reasonable accommodations. The American Legion views the treaty as beneficial to military veterans with disabilities who work, serve, travel and live abroad. In a Nov. 1 letter of support to Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Menendez and Ranking Member Bob Corker, Dellinger wrote, "I would like to express our strong support for the... treaty that seeks to ensure that countries around the globe provide people with disabilities the same rights as everyone else in order to live full, satisfying and productive lives. We urge swift, bipartisan action by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in favorably reporting this important treaty to the full Senate. "Some have expressed misgivings about the treaty. However, we are confident these concerns have been addressed by the adoption of a set of conditions called reservations, understandings and declarations. These conditions protect U.S. sovereignty, ensure parental rights and recognize the treaty as a nondiscrimination instrument, similar to the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act." Dellinger went on to point to broad-based support for the treaty by faith-based groups, civil rights organizations, disability groups, business leaders – such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce – as well as fellow veterans' service organizations. A resolution in support of the treaty was passed at the 95th American Legion National Convention in Houston. It reads, in part, "The United States must ratify the Disabilities Treaty because it embodies the principles of the ADA and reinforces our leadership in the promotion of opportunities for disabled veterans, service members, and their families with disabilities to travel, study, work and serve in the world community..." The United States signed the CRPD in 2009. The treaty was negotiated during the George W. Bush administration. A ratification vote by the Senate fell five votes short of passage last December despite broad bipartisan support. Congressional leaders plan to bring the treaty before the 113th Congress for another vote shortly.

Consolidated Post Reports

A recent article in the August, 2014 DISPATCH read, in part, as follows. Each year, American Legion posts around the world donate millions of volunteer hours, raise millions of dollars for the benefit of their community and Legion programs, and positively influence millions of lives. This information is captured on the Legion's Consolidated Post Report (CPR) that posts have been submitting for the past 40 years to assist departments in the documentation of activities that a specific post completed during the **12-month (June 1 through May 31)** reporting period. This year, **12** departments reported 100 percent reporting and they are: Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oregon, Virginia and Wisconsin. These departments Commanders were recognized with a plaque from National Commander Dellinger at the National Convention in Charlotte. There were also **seven** departments who were recognized with a certificate for achieving 75 percent or higher reporting: Alaska, California, Kentucky, Ohio, Vermont, West Virginia and Wyoming.

Only **57 percent** of all posts during **the 2012-2013** membership year submitted Consolidated Post Reports. All American Legion national commanders testify before a joint session of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs following their election to report on American Legion hours donated, monies raised and expended to serve our veterans and our programs. Unfortunately, the numbers never depict the true picture of who The American Legion is.

However, **the 2013-2014** reporting increased to **67 percent** with nearly 9,000 posts submitting a CPR – an increase of 800 posts reporting from last year. For the 2014-2015 membership year, show the many ways Legionnaires in your post are making difference in their communities and beyond by completing the CPR. When reports are due, the form can be filled out online: www.mylegion.org located under "Post and Department" options. Or submitted by mail by downloading it online, located under Membership Services: www.legion.org/publications.

Military Pay Raise

The American Legion's new national commander, Michael D. Helm, took issue with President Barack Obama's support for a 1-percent pay raise in 2015 for members of the armed forces. Elected for a one-year term during the Legion's 96th Annual National Convention in Charlotte, N.C., last month, Helm expressed disappointment over the paltry pay increase. "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. According to data released Aug. 19 by the federal government, the country's inflation rate has stood at 2 percent for the past 12 months. While the White House wants to cap the military's basic pay increase at 1 percent, Congress could appropriate a larger increase, Helm said. "We are well aware of the budgetary constraints our government is operating under," Helm said. "We are also aware of the fact that America's service members received only a 1-percent increase last year – the lowest since the all-volunteer force was created. "The American Legion wants the White House and Congress to agree on a pay raise for our troops that keeps up with the inflation rate – that means 2 percent. It is the least we can do, even in these trying fiscal times, to maintain a decent quality of life for our service members." New data on the country's inflation rate is scheduled to be released by the federal government on Sept. 17.

PTSD Info

The Department of Defense issued supplemental guidelines on Sept. 3 that will help its review boards when considering petitions for discharge upgrades from veterans claiming they had post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at the time of separation. The guidelines, issued in a memo from Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, will be used by DoD's Military Department Boards for Correction of Military/Naval Records. They will help in considering whether service members suffered from PTSD while on active duty, and if that condition may have contributed to their discharges under other-than-honorable conditions. American Legion National Commander Michael D. Helm welcomed DoD's announcement. "As the only veteran's service organization that automatically helps veterans with discharge petitions, The American Legion knows that many veterans are going to get the break they have deserved for several decades." Helm said the Legion's office in Washington handles many petitions from veterans to have their discharges upgraded to the "honorable" or "general" categories. "Many of those veterans getting our help served in Vietnam, and many of them came home with undiagnosed PTSD and a bad conduct or dishonorable discharge they never should have received." The Legion's Washington office participated in conference call on Sept. 4 with DoD experts, who clarified the meaning and effect of the new guideline and answered questions. In 2013, The American Legion handled 211 discharge petitions and appeared at 85 military board hearings; of 193 petitions decided on, 60 of them received upgrades.

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>.

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:

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| * 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 25, Thursday – VAMC Charleston, Main Auditorium, 1st floor, 109 Bee St., seeking input on Veterans health care plans for the future.

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 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.

VA News

Veterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald said the recurring complaint he heard during a month-long listening tour across America is that his department's culture is still too closed and unfriendly. To counter that, he has been giving out his personal cell phone and email at every stop — to lawmakers, media members, employees, and large groups of frustrated veterans. “We need to rebuild relationships with veterans and other stakeholders,” McDonald said during a press conference in Washington, D.C., on Monday. “We’re trying to reach out, establish relationships, learn about what’s going wrong and figure out how to improve.” Monday’s event was the official launch of VA’s new “Road to Veterans Day” initiative, a push to reform and rebrand the department in McDonald’s first 100 days in office. The moves include internal reforms in how things like inter-office communications and appointment scheduling are handled, and outreach to community leaders to help with recruiting new workers and fixing future problems. McDonald, a former CEO of Procter & Gamble who took over the cabinet post after former secretary Eric Shinseki resigned, has promised significant changes in a short period of time. He has mandated that employees reaffirm their commitment to putting veterans first, and re-examine their workload to jettison any tasks that interfere with providing direct care to veterans. On Monday, he noted that the department currently has 14 different websites to access veterans programs, each with a separate login and password. “That’s just flat-out wrong,” he said, acknowledging that VA “is too complicated from a veteran’s standpoint.” He has also promised to discipline workers found to be harming veterans, either through negligence or malice. The department has been in turmoil for months since reports showed evidence of record manipulation and lengthy medical care wait times for veterans at dozens of VA sites, and Congress recently passed new legislation to ease rules to quickly dismiss senior executives for mismanagement. McDonald said that this summer alone, the department has started disciplinary actions against more than 30 employees for malfeasance and incompetence, including at least five senior executives. But lawmakers and department critics have said that pace is still too slow to root out problem workers. McDonald acknowledged that more than 100 cases involving VA facilities are currently under investigation by department and outside legal agencies, and promised more actions will be taken when those reviews are complete. He also said that fixing VA will require more than firing individuals, and spoke about the importance of building new leaders and recruiting top talent into the department. “We’re working hard to create and sustain a climate that embraces constructive dissent, that welcomes critical feedback,” he said. “I want every employee to criticize what we do and help us improve.” But McDonald also pushed back against the public narrative about VA being a broken mess, touting the Veterans Health Administration as full of dedicated employees with innovative health ideas. He insisted that veterans should be proud of VA, even as they demand changes.

Proud To Serve

Lloyd H. Woods
Department Adjutant