



## Department of South Carolina The American Legion

P.O. Box 3309, Irmo, SC 29063

Tel: (803) 612-1171

E-mail: [dept.adjutant@sc.twcbe.com](mailto:dept.adjutant@sc.twcbe.com)

Website: [www.scarolinalegion.org](http://www.scarolinalegion.org)



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# SOUTH CAROLINA NEWS LINE

**Growth is painful; Change is painful. But nothing is as painful as staying somewhere you don't belong.**

### 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](http://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](http://www.legion.org/publications).

### **Late Event Notice**

I must apologize for the lateness of this notice. I lost the original information and completely forgot about it until I received information Monday from Greg Bennett. Thank you very much Greg for reminding me. On Friday, September 19, AARP South Carolina along with Veteran's Welcome Home and Resource Center, Palmetto Goodwill, Myrtle Beach Harley-Davidson and more than 40 federal, state and local resource organizations and service providers will sponsor "Stand Down at the Beach." The event commences at 8 a.m. and goes until 2 p.m. at the U.S. Army Reserve, 3392 Phillis Boulevard. This is the first ever event of this type staged in Horry County. Volunteers are still needed to assist staff with the event and can sign up at <http://vols.pt/MnNxRt>. FMI contact Patrick Cobb 803-261-0304 or Doris Gleason 803-765-7375.

### **Fiscal Information**

The following was reported, in part, in the latest "Stars and Stripes". An already tough fiscal environment prompting proposed benefit cuts would get far worse if Congress does not repeal another round of sequestration in 2016, a top U.S. Defense Department official warned military spouses and civilians at town meetings here. "If not, everything is on the table," said Jessica Wright, undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness. The uncertainty means it will be difficult to predict funding for child care, family services, traumatic brain injury and other benefits, she said. Wright is one of a number of DOD officials who have warned of impending cuts that they say will cut the size of the armed forces and take money from necessary equipment upgrades, placing readiness and national security at risk. In fact, Wright said, the Pentagon's proposed 2015 budget represents an attempt to reduce benefits to spend the savings on readiness. The budget includes a reduction in the housing allowance, a 1 percent military pay raise, massive cuts to commissary subsidies and potentially increased medical fees. "Quality of life is higher," she said. "Quality of service is on the skids." A proposed change in commissary funding, which the Pentagon says would reduce the savings on groceries from 30 percent to 10 percent of the cost compared with groceries bought on the economy, has proved highly unpopular. "Why did we want to do that?" she said. "None of us wants to send a service member into combat unprepared." Still, she said, it appeared Congress, which must approve the change, did not "have an appetite to do that."

### **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>.

## Gamecock Football

There is a new program called “SEATS FOR SOLDIERS” by the Gamecock Group Sales Office. The purpose is to purchase tickets that will be donated on the donors behalf to bring deserving military families to the gamecock football game vs. Furman on October 18. The ticket cost is \$25.00 per ticket. For more information contact the group sales office at 803-777-8850.

## Pro Bono Info

Lawyers4Vets - Monthly Pro Bono Veterans Legal Clinic

**Introduction:** As a service to area Veterans, the South Carolina Applesed 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 19, Friday** – Standdown at the Beach, 8 a.m.-2 p.m., U.S. Army Reserve location

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

**September 24, Wednesday** – Dorn VAMC Outreach fair/town hall event. See article below.

**September 25, Thursday** – VAMC Charleston, Main Auditorium, 1<sup>st</sup> 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](http://luminaryinitiative.com) website to honor, support and remember the families of our fallen heroes.

**September 28, Sunday** – Task Force Marshall Graduation 1 p.m. (See article following)

## Task Force Marshall

The next graduation for Task Force Marshall is September 28, 2014 at 1:00 p.m. It is recommended that all be in place by 12:45 p.m. There are 146 Sailors graduating in this class. The graduation is being held in Building 3800, the large red brick building on the right upon entering the guard gate. The training center is located at 5395 Leesburg Road, Eastover, SC. Please have identification upon entering the gate. The gate on Leesburg Road is the **only** access into McCrady. FMI Carol Davis (803) 739-2774/(803) 467-4482.

## 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.

### **Dorn VA Event**

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."

Proud To Serve

Lloyd H. Woods  
Department Adjutant