DUES INCREASE: PRICE OF A CUP OF COFFEE

An increase of $5 per year needed to fulfill Legion’s mission to assist veterans, troops, youth and those coming home from war.

Nearly a decade has passed since The American Legion’s last national per-capita dues increase. During that span, the U.S. cost of living has climbed 13 percent. An economic downturn unseen since the Great Depression has trimmed interest income from American Legion investments by over 35 percent. And the pool of veterans eligible for American Legion membership has declined by about 20 percent.

With more than 3 million veterans of the global war on terrorism restarting civilian lives, or soon to do so, and looking to The American Legion for help, the National Executive Committee passed a resolution at the 2015 Spring Meetings in Indianapolis to recommend a $5 per-capita annual increase in national membership dues. It amounts to about 1.4 cents a day.

The NEC’s recommendation comes at a time when the need for American Legion advocacy, expertise, influence, services and programs are sorely needed in every corner of our nation. Veterans are waiting too long for benefits claims decisions and medical appointments, and need well-trained and accredited American Legion service officers right now and for years to come. Nearly 4,000 veterans sought help at about two dozen Veterans Benefits Center events over the last year where they received firsthand, on-the-spot assistance, including over $1 million in retroactive, past-due disability benefits.

The most obvious takeaway from those events is that veterans and their families need, and will continue to need, American Legion

See Dues increase: Price of a cup of coffee on Page 4
COMMANDER’S MESSAGE

Your donations at work

When I stood on the national convention stage last year in Charlotte, N.C., to deliver my acceptance speech as your new national commander, I set a goal for the entire Legion Family – to raise a combined $4 million for the various Legion charitable programs. I knew it could be done, and your generosity this past membership year has proven it.

More than $5.5 million has been raised to date, and donations will continue to pour in leading up to, and during, this year’s national convention in Baltimore. The efforts of the Legion Family to surpass my initial goal of $4 million is outstanding. Thank you!

Your donations over the past year have helped us meet the needs of our veterans and their families in many ways. For example, since January your donations have helped us to:

- Provide an Afghanistan veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress with a service dog.
- Deliver food, clothing, blankets, games, rehab equipment and other necessities to several VA medical centers. Visit www.legion.org/ocw to see all of the VA facilities that have been grateful for your efforts.
- Provide $425,000 in Temporary Financial Assistance, helping 340 veteran families and 800 children with food, shelter, utilities and clothing expenses.
- Grant 32 college scholarships of $1,612 apiece to children who had a parent die while on active-duty military service on or after 9/11.

These are just a few of the many ways your generous donations have enabled our veterans and their families to live a happier, healthier daily life. To learn more about your donations at work, read the Legion’s 2015 Annual Report online at www.legion.org/annualreport.

As my time as your national commander is drawing to a close, I know the Legion Family will continue supporting those who allow us to have the freedoms that we enjoy every day because it is our duty as veterans, and sons and daughters of veterans, to uphold The American Legion’s mission of devotion to servicemembers and veterans.

Michael D. Helm
National Commander

MEMBERSHIP

Support Commander Helm’s fundraiser

National Commander Mike Helm set a goal for the Legion Family to raise a combined $4 million for the various American Legion and Auxiliary charities during his year-long tenure as national commander. Donations have far exceeded Helm’s goal.

As the August issue of Dispatch was going to print, donations totaled $5,576,326. www.legion.org/donate

The Legion’s charitable programs include the Legacy Scholarship Fund, National Emergency Fund, Child Welfare Foundation, Endowment Fund, Operation Comfort Warriors and Soldier’s Wish. Auxiliary’s charitable programs include the Emergency Fund, Spirit of Youth Scholarship Fund, Children of Warriors National Presidents’ Scholarship and American Legion Auxiliary Foundation.

MEMBERSHIP

Recruiters to be honored with ‘Stay On Course’ pin

During the 2014-2015 membership year, American Legion National Commander Mike Helm will award his national commander pin to any Legion Family member who obtains three new members or renews five members into the Legion.

A new member is any eligible person joining for the 2015 membership year who was not a member of The American Legion during the 2014 membership year.

Each member listed must be eligible for membership in The American Legion. Forward names of SAL members or Auxiliary members to your detachment or unit for use in their respective incentive programs.

To maintain the integrity of the national commander’s pin incentive program, only one pin will be awarded per individual. Upon receipt, national membership staff will confirm the names and mail the pin directly to the person who earned it. Commander Helm’s pin incentive program will end when supplies are exhausted.

www.legion.org/commander/pin
NATIONAL ADJUTANT’S MESSAGE

Official credentials for national convention

See what credentials are acceptable for admittance to all national convention venues.

By Daniel S. Wheeler

The American Legion’s 2015 national convention is Aug. 28 - Sept. 3 in Baltimore. The following credentials are considered acceptable official credentials for admittance to all national convention venues, including the convention floor, exhibit hall, shuttle bus transportation, etc.:

- National Headquarters staff badge
- Distinguished Guest badge
- Commission & Committee Visitor badge
- The American Legion Convention badge
- Sons of the American Legion Convention badge
- American Legion Auxiliary Convention badge
- News media credential
- Special ID card for past national commanders
- Exhibitor’s badge

The following are not acceptable for admittance to a national convention venue, including convention floor, exhibit hall, shuttle bus transportation, etc.:

- White ribbon with blue lettering marked “Delegation Chairman”
- White ribbon with blue lettering marked “Delegation Secretary”
- Delegate (blue), Alternate (yellow) or Guest (red) ribbon
- National American Legion Press Association pass
- National American Legion Press Association button

These credentials are merely used as forms of identification. For entrance to convention venues, all of the above must be worn in conjunction with a national convention badge.

All delegates and alternates, as well as guests to the respective national conventions of The American Legion, must register prior to, or during, the national convention. Proper registration will ensure each attendee has the necessary credentials to enter the venues of the national convention. Without the proper credentials, access to various venues of the national convention will be denied.

All guests of The American Legion Family who are 18 years of age or older will be required to register just as delegates and alternates are required to register. Guests who are younger than 18 years of age, and who are not delegates or alternates to the SAL or Auxiliary National Conventions, will be provided guest credentials at no charge.

Registration fee for delegates, alternates and guests 18 years of age or older attending the national convention is $25 per person.

Delegate, alternate and guest certification forms were emailed to all departments in early July.

Identification information

The following is identification information for the 2015 National Convention in Baltimore:

- National sergeants-at-arms and special assistants wear red arm bands.
- Assistant sergeants-at-arms wear blue arm bands.
- Convention badges worn by commission and committee visitors have purple ribbon with gold lettering marked “Commission & Committee Visitor.”
- Convention badges worn by delegates have a blue ribbon with gold lettering marked “Delegate.”
- Convention badges worn by alternates have a yellow ribbon with blue lettering marked “Alternate.”
- Convention badges worn by guests have a red ribbon with gold lettering marked “Guest.”

Share your post-related success story
Email: dispatch@legion.org

All American Legion publications are entitled and encouraged to reproduce all staff-written stories within, but please credit Dispatch as the source.

A proud member of The National American Legion Press Association.
representation because the road to VA reform is certain to be long and fraught with challenges.

This is not a time to divest from The American Legion’s ability to serve veterans, members of the U.S. armed forces or young people. A national $5 per-capita dues increase — about the price of one large coffee over the span of a year — can prevent National Headquarters from having to cut programs and services over the course of an entire decade.

The natural attrition of veterans from early-20th-century war eras has contributed greatly to a 16 percent drop in membership since the last dues increase passed. That accounts for a nearly $5.7 million revenue reduction since 2007.

To offset that, National Headquarters has worked to stimulate corporate relationships, improve its charitable giving program and reduce operational costs through digital technology. All these efforts have helped stave off earlier dues increase recommendations that would have been necessary given the economy and membership situation.

The Legion’s non-member fundraising program has grown significantly and is now netting about $1.4 million to the positive, but it took more than three years to get there. The national television advertising program is off to a similar start, and a number of technological initiatives like online joining, renewal and sustained giving help the bottom line.

All these efforts are trending toward reduced reliance on membership dues, but it will take some time to get there. The American Legion’s ability to succeed over the next decade depends on positive cash flow and the ability to invest in the future. Without this dues increase, National Headquarters would be looking at entering its centennial celebration year staring at an estimated budget deficit of $6.78 million.

Nearly a century has passed since The American Legion’s founders made their commitment to serve veterans, troops and families in their communities, states and nation. American Legion members have never retreated from that commitment. At a time of war, a time of homecoming and a time of need among our nation’s veterans, families and young people, there is no better place to invest an extra $5 a year.

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**ASK A SERVICE OFFICER**

**VA benefits beyond the basic programs**

**Q. Are there VA benefits that I may not know about?**

**A.** Many veterans know about the basic health-care and education benefits available to them through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), but the following are other ancillary benefit programs.

- **Aid and Attendance:** Through the Aid and Attendance program, veterans may be eligible to receive money to cover the cost of nursing homes, assisted living programs and other long-term care options. Couples may receive up to $25,000 and surviving spouses up to $13,560 a year to cover their long-term care costs.

- **Burial benefits:** A U.S. flag may be requested to drape over a veteran’s casket and families may request a Presidential Memorial Certificate to honor the deceased loved one’s service. VA also provides a free headstone or grave marker.

- **GI Bill:** The GI Bill offers up to $2,000 to help cover the cost of certification courses or other vocational training programs. This benefit works well for veterans who wish to change careers or pursue a career path that does not require a college degree. Unused credits through the GI Bill may be transferred to spouses and dependents of veterans, although there are service limits required to transfer the benefits.

- **Life insurance:** Veterans may receive up to $400,000 in life insurance through Veterans’ Group Life Insurance program, which offers competitive premium rates.

- **Housing assistance:** Veterans having trouble making their mortgage payments are eligible for repayment assistance through the VA. Options for help include special repayment plans, loan forbearance and loan modification programs. Additional benefits are available for homeless veterans and veterans with VA loans. The VA maintains a list of homes serviced by VA loans that have gone into foreclosures, and veterans have the ability to search the list of VA-acquired properties and purchase homes at a discount. You do not have to be a veteran to search the properties, but all properties qualify for VA financing.

Contact a Legion service officer at www.legion.org/serviceofficers to assist with VA benefit claims.

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**CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION SPOTLIGHT**

**Post 70 in Nutley, N.J.**

The reconstructed Model T – known as “The Brass Hat” to members of American Legion Post 70 in Nutley, N.J., since its roof was brass – accompanied Post 70’s drum corps members to parades and was used for advertising events in Nutley. The car was destroyed in a fire on Fifth Avenue in New York City during The American Legion’s 1937 national convention parade.

**SHARE YOUR POST’S LEGACY**

Upload photos, print materials and videos of your post’s history on the Legion’s Centennial Celebration website: www.legion.org/centennial
Texas, Arizona youth win Legion air rifle championships

By Steve Brooks

The American Legion celebrated its 25th annual Junior 3-Position Air Rifle National Championship in Colorado Springs, Colo., July 24-25, and crowned two champions—Rhiann Travis of Weatherford, Texas, captured the precision title and Adam McClintock of Tucson, Ariz., captured the sporter title. Both earned $5,000 scholarships funded by The American Legion and Sons of The American Legion.

Travis, who will be a senior at Weatherford Christian School and was sponsored by Parker County Post 163, said participating in competitive shooting has led to a "monumental change" for her. "Before I started shooting I was kind of that awkward, unsure, never really knew where I fit in," she said. "I found my niche (in shooting). There were people here just like me: quirky, weird, shy. I really kind of came out of my shell. I was able to be me."

McClintock, who was sponsored by Morgan McDermott Post 7 in Tucson, said he came into the tournament struggling. "Over the summer I've had a really bad string, so I was hoping to just finish in the middle of the field," he said. "(This feels) great, of course."

McClintock said shooting played a big role in turning his life around. Both his parents were killed in a motorcycle accident when he was a freshman, and he struggled academically his first two years of high school. But at his uncle’s urging, he joined the Flowing Wells High School ROTC program. Not coincidentally, he posted grade-point averages of 3.6 and 4.0 over his final two years of high school, was named the state’s 4A/5A AIA Scholar Athlete of the Year and was accepted to the University of Arizona.

"Before I started shooting, I had a really low GPA in school," McClintock said. "After I started (shooting), that gave me the inspiration to keep my grades up to stay on the team. In the beginning (of high school), my GPA would not have even allowed me to get into a college."

McClintock got more out of the week than just championships. The schedule for the participants included lunches together, a pizza party and awards banquet. "This feels great, of course."

Did you know?

- American Legion Riders in Missouri (pictured above) conducted a Legacy Run throughout the state the last week of June to raise donations for the Legion’s Legacy Scholarship Fund. Post 114 in Sikeston raised and donated more than $13,000.

- The Department of Wisconsin’s “Spirit of Wisconsin Ride” in June raised more than $27,000 for the Legion’s Legacy Scholarship Fund over the course of three days and 700 miles. The ride stopped at Legion posts where they were greeted with meals and donations.

- Nearly $619,000 was raised and donated to The American Legion’s Child Welfare Foundation for the 2014-2015 contribution year. Of the total amount, Sons of The American Legion raised and donated $360,510.

- The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation is the proud recipient of the Immune Deficiency Foundation Impact Award “in gratitude for the many years of commitment and contributions” to IDF.

- The fourth annual Tractor Relay Across Nebraska raised $10,766 for The American Legion’s Operation Comfort Warriors program. Last year, the tractor relay raised $4,300 – the first time the group raised money for a specific charity. About 100 farmers rode antique tractors in early June for the nine-day, 400-mile ride.
Mobile service company offers discount to Legionnaires

The American Legion recently formed an alliance with Defense Mobile to offer Legion members a discounted rate on their cell phone service. The Connecticut-based company’s mission is to connect and improve the lives of military veterans and current servicemembers by delivering superior wireless coverage on the nation’s largest networks at discounted savings.

As the only mobile service built exclusively for veterans, military servicemembers and their families, Defense Mobile is offering Legion members a 10 percent discount on mobile service for life when a member verifies his or her military affiliation using his or her Legion member ID number. This offer is available to current members, as well as to those who join the Legion in the future.

Defense Mobile offers individual and family plans at low cost with no-contract plans and no-activation fees, as well as a 30-day money-back guarantee. For unlimited talk/text, individual plans start at $35 a month, and family plans start at $95 for two lines.

When mobile users switch to Defense Mobile, their network and coverage remains the same, but their monthly bill and service support come from Defense Mobile. Customers can also keep their phone and Defense Mobile will send a new SIM card, or new smartphones can be purchased through them.

Besides having cheaper mobile service plans, Defense Mobile CEO and Co-founder Brendan Reilly said another incentive to switch to Defense Mobile is its veteran-friendly customer service agents who are all veterans. “It’s not someone saying, ‘Oh, your phone’s not working.’ It’s, ‘Sir, I get it. I will do whatever it takes. You have my personal commitment because I’m a vet, you’re a vet, and we’re in this together,’” Reilly said.

Legion members can learn more about Defense Mobile and how to start receiving discounted cell service by visiting: www.defensemobile.com/legion

DATELINE: CAPITOL HILL

Veteran ID Card Act signed into law

On July 20, President Barack Obama signed into law P.L. 114-31, the Veterans ID Card Act of 2015 that creates a new identification card (ID) for a requesting veteran who is neither entitled to military retired pay nor enrolled in the VA healthcare system. VA currently only provides VA-enrolled veterans with an ID card.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Vern Buchanan, R-Fla., requires the VA ID card to display the veterans name and photograph, and it serves as proof that the veteran has a DD-214 or other military service record. The card will not serve as proof of entitlement to any VA benefits.

With the new ID cards, veterans will not have to carry around their DD-214s, which decreases the potential for identity theft and fraud because they will not contain the same personal information that is contained on a DD-214.

The new VA ID card will be available to all honorably discharged veterans. A veteran requesting an ID card will have to provide a name, photograph and proof of his or her military service. VA will charge a fee for the card and there’s not a set date when the cards will be available.

House looks into veteran unemployability benefit

On July 15, the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs held a hearing to examine the Total Disability based on Individual Unemployability (TDIU) benefit in the Veterans Benefits Administration. The TDIU benefit is intended for veterans whose disabilities don’t meet the 100 percent rating by the ratings schedule, but whose overall disability picture prevents them from finding and maintaining gainful employment.

American Legion Legislative Director Ian de Planque testifies on behalf of the Legion, citing concerns about a recent Government Accountability Office report that raised the possibility of reducing or discontinuing the benefit for veterans “above the working age, aged 65 or older.” Not only does the law clearly state the benefit is intended to be considered without regard to the age of the veteran, de Planque noted that many veterans who receive the benefit have been on disability for much of their working lives, preventing them from accumulating a retirement portfolio as they would at a job. “These vulnerable veterans need the benefit to see them through their retirement years more than ever,” de Planque said.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the percentage of the workforce continuing to work over the age of 65 has more than doubled over the last 30 years, with half of those elderly Americans working full-time. A panelist from Disabled American Veterans pointed out that a large numbers of Congress members aged 65 or older “still draw a paycheck every year” and expressed concern that this benefit would be considered for removal or reduction for veterans. Committee members stated they did not believe the benefit should be removed, but felt there may be a way to rename it or a way to ensure compensation for veterans at the top of the age bracket.

The American Legion suggested better income verification processes similar to what VA has moved toward in the pension program since there’s not an automated system with the TDIU benefit, which can lead to delays in benefits for veterans in need.
MEMBERSHIP INCENTIVES AND AWARDS

BIG TWELVE COMPETITION

The Big Twelve Competition recognizes departments that meet or exceed their pledged membership goal percentage by the March target date. The percentage does not include members gained through DMS.

The competition is broken down into six categories. The winner in each category will be reimbursed for computer equipment purchases of up to $2,000, while the runners-up in each category will be reimbursed for computer equipment purchases of up to $1,000.

The six categories in the Big Twelve Competition are:
- **Category I** – departments of 100,000 or more members
- **Category II** – departments of 70,000-99,999 members
- **Category III** – departments of 40,000-69,999 members
- **Category IV** – departments of 25,000-39,999 members
- **Category V** – departments of 10,000-24,999 members
- **Category VI** – departments of 9,999 or fewer members

Read more about the Big Twelve Competition by downloading the online National Membership Points Award Manual publication located under Internal Affairs.

www.legion.org/publications

POST EXCELLENCE AWARD CONTINUES

The Post Excellence Award program honors posts that show excellence in membership participation, youth activities, community service, and support to veterans and U.S. troops.

**Criteria**
- **Membership.** Post membership must be at least one member more than the previous year. A post officer must attend district meetings.
- **Youth activities.** The post must sponsor and actively participate in at least one primary youth program: Boys State, Legion Baseball, Oratorical Contest, Boy Scouts of America or Junior Shooting Sports.
- **Community service.** The post must organize a community service project that involves members of the Legion, Auxiliary or Sons of The American Legion. A monetary donation may only be one part of a project.
- **Service to troops or veterans.** The post must organize a project supporting troops or veterans (for example, Family Support Network or Operation Comfort Warriors) that involves members of the Legion, Auxiliary or SAL outside the post. A monetary donation may only be one part of a project.

**Certification.** District commanders must certify posts as having fulfilled the four specified criteria, and submit a list of the post’s name, number, address and commander’s name to department headquarters. If possible, accompany with copies of press releases submitted to local media that raise awareness for the projects and enhance the Legion’s public image.

**Awards.** Each qualifying post, as well as district commanders whose districts have at least 50 percent of posts reach certification, will receive a certificate of recognition.

www.legion.org/commander/postexcellence

EIGHT DEPARTMENTS ACHIEVE 95 PERCENT OR HIGHER REPORTING

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.

The eight departments with 95 percent or higher reporting this year are: Florida, Georgia, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Oregon, Virginia and Wisconsin. National Commander Michael Helm will recognize the respective department commanders on stage during national convention in Baltimore with a certificate.

And eight departments will be recognized with a certificate for achieving 75 percent or higher reporting: Arizona, Idaho, Maryland, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Vermont and West Virginia.

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, and monies raised and expended to serve our veterans and our programs. For the 2015-2016 membership year, show the many ways Legionnaires in your post are making a difference in their communities and beyond by completing the CPR. When reports are due, fill the form out online at mylegion.org under “Post and Department” options.
COMMUNITY SERVICE

Legionnaire restores benches for wounded heroes

When Ed Cutler became aware of a double amputee Afghanistan veteran receiving a new home due to his injuries, he delivered a restored garden bench to the young man as a thank you for his service. A member of Post 36 in Windsor Locks, Conn., Cutler has since given several benches to World War II and Vietnam veterans.

“I figure a (veteran) might be sitting on his front steps all depressed and kind of sad his life has changed,” he said.

“Then all of a sudden some old guy shows up and says, ‘Here you go, Joe. Thanks for your service.’ It just might make his day, make him feel he’s not forgotten.”

Broken benches donated by community members fill Cutler’s garage, driveway and backyard for him to restore and deliver to local wounded veterans.

“I’ve just been blessed so if there’s something I can do, why not pay back a little bit,” he said.