



**Department of Montana  
Fall Conference  
Helena, Montana  
October 26-27, 2024  
Reports of The  
Department Executive Committee  
&  
Department Committee Chairs  
“For God and Country”**

# Preamble to the Constitution

**FOR GOD AND COUNTRY, WE ASSOCIATE OURSELVES TOGETHER  
FOR THE FOLLOWING PURPOSES:**

To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America;

To maintain law and order;

To foster and perpetuate a one hundred percent Americanism;

To preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in All Wars;

To inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation;

To combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses;

To make right the master of might;

To promote peace and goodwill on earth;

To safeguard and transmit to Posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy;

To consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness.



## **DEPARTMENT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

### **DEPARTMENT COMMANDER**

**Ken Simon**

I would like to say Thank You to all of you who venture to the East Side of our Great State to attend the Department Convention. It was really good to see so many of you there and sincerely hope that you had an enjoyable visit and found something to see and or do while you were there. Several of you made comments to me about the “windshield time” you had on your journey to Glasgow and that you understood what my drive from here to wherever I go entailed, especially the trips to Helena, Missoula, or Polson. That drive never gets boring or tiresome for me because I see the beauty in our state during those drives and get to meet a lot of people along the way. And I have made the drive many times before as a member of the Montana National Guards 163<sup>rd</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment. Again, Thank You to all who ventured to Glasgow and made the Convention a Really Good one.

July 4<sup>th</sup>, I attended the Flag ceremony at the Vets Club parking lot done by the Legion and VFW, as well as the Parade at noon and the Dedication of the Veteran’s Memorial in Plentywood along with VFW Department Commander Lonnie Johnson, Post Commander Paul McKay, members of the Montana Highway Patrol, Customs and Border Protection Border Patrol, Sheridan County Sheriff’s Officers, Plentywood and Rural Fire Departments, EMS and Sons of the American Legion. The Veteran’s Memorial was completed through a fund drive and also some donation work from various organizations.

On July 13<sup>th</sup>, I attended the funeral for Past Department Commander Art Sell in Big Timber. Art was a member of Post 19 and as Department Commander from 1999 to 2000.

During the Montana State Fair in Gt Falls on July 29<sup>th</sup>, I worked the American Legion Booth with Zone Commander Andy Rice and Department Vice Commander Kim Kay. We sold cash calendars, and raffle tickets and talked to people about the American Legion.

August 8<sup>th</sup> my wife Corinne and I drove to Helena for the funeral of Past Department Chaplain and Western Zone Commander Bill White, who passed away at his home on July 31<sup>st</sup>.

District 10 Vice Commander Cindy Tusler invited me and my wife Corinne to Terry Post 32 for the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group USO Party and Dance. Jeff Scheid gave a presentation on Rosie Rosenthal, who flew 22 bombing missions with the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group over Europe and John E Schwarz who was in charge of the photography lab and documented the war through his film and photographs. They showed a New Documentary (2024) that features True Story Interviews and video footage of the Real-Life heroes of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. The film Titled “Bloody Hundredth” was Narrated by Tom Hanks and Executive Producer Steven Spielberg. (NOTE: There is a Miniseries about the 100<sup>th</sup> real-life airman who inspired the “Masters of the Air” miniseries as they share their stories. The Documentary premiered in March 2024!

It was a very interesting evening and made more so as relatives of John E Schwarz were in attendance. On the wall of the Post are colored photos of the aircraft and crews, all taken by John Schwarz. Interestingly, they are but a few of the many photos that John Schwarz took. There is a discussion about the possibility of having them rotate the photos through the Posts across the state in the future. Those discussions hinge on how, when, and where that can be accomplished. The final determination will be made by the Schwarz family relatives. If you are travelling East further than Terry or returning home, I encourage you to stop in and visit the Terry Post to see the photos!

I travelled to New Orleans, Louisiana August 22 with my wife to attend the American Legion National Convention. As part of the National Security Commission and Committee I was in attendance at the Commission Meetings on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>.

I attended the General Session on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, and 28<sup>th</sup> in the Convention Center, the 28<sup>th</sup> being the Election of the new National American Legion Commander James A LaCoursiere of Post 91 in Connecticut, and the Five National Vice Commanders. Our new Western Regional Vice Commander is Gary Leach from California. We returned home to Montana on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

September saw the district meetings with the new schedule whereby all of the Fall District Meetings were held on Saturday on a trial basis. The meetings would be conducted by the Zone and District Commanders aided by the information sent in a pamphlet format with the same information that the Department Adjutant would normally put out. One of the reasons for this was due to the cost of travel to and from and motel rooms for Department personnel. I attended District 1 Fall meeting here in Plentywood, hosted by Post 58 and the meeting was chaired by District Commander Jerry Davenport. Roll call was taken and there were enough Posts present for a quorum. Veterans Assistance Officer Earl Edmonds from Miles City was present to assist anyone who needed to go over their claim or talk to Earl about getting one started.

October 5<sup>th</sup>, I sat in on a Zoom meeting of the Department Finance Committee chaired by the Department Finance Officer.

October 6<sup>th</sup> through the 9<sup>th</sup> I travelled to Indiana to attend the Commanders and Adjutants call at the American Legion Headquarters in Indianapolis. On the 7<sup>th</sup> there was a Legal training class given by the American Legion Judge Advocate General, Mark Seavey. He advised us that this is normally a three-hour class that he was going to condense down to one hour! It was a very informative class on the proper do's and don'ts of a Commander that will keep one out of trouble! He also pointed out that it was NOT wise to cut corners – make sure your 990 was filed – Read your Constitution and Bylaws, which I took to include your Adjutant and Vice Commander and Keep minutes of ALL meetings! Next came the Nine Corporate Rules that could apply to All Posts! Another important Point that was brought up was: Four Rules of a Program, with Rule 1: Leadership – Rule 2: Rules – Rule 3: Reports, Rule 4: Controls. Other classes covered by other instructors were Member Engagement, Americanism: Children & Youth, 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. That date is July 4, 2026!

Sons of the American Legion Dominates the donations to National Emergency Fund & Child Welfare. Their National Commander issued a Challenge to the American Legion Commander and the American Legion Auxiliary President.

American Legion Baseball's 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday is coming up. The Initial Resolution proposing an American Legion Baseball program was passed at the Department of South Dakota's Convention on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1925. You can keep up on plans for American Legion Baseball's 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration at [Legion.org/baseball](http://Legion.org/baseball) and on Social Media Face Book or X.

Marketing discussion was on Suicide and Be The One! We all know that the two Past National Commanders have carried the Be The One Program through their year and our New National Commander, James A La Coursiere is carrying on that program this year! To put Veteran Suicide into perspective, there were 7,000 Combat deaths since 2001 and 131,000 Veteran Suicides since 2001! I ask each one to keep the Be The One Program in mind and in our Posts activities and we as a team can help reduce Veteran Suicide!

October 14<sup>th</sup>, I sat in on a Department Zoom meeting on Constitution and Internal Affairs discussion where planning was discussed in regard to updating our Department Constitution and Bylaws. That committee will meet again four times between now and Spring Convention to fine tune the updated Constitution and Bylaws.

This brings me up to our Fall Conference and I want to say a personal Thank you to ALL of you for the hard work that you do every day for the Veterans, not only in our Great State of Montana, but around the country. We can accomplish a lot by working together for the Posts, community, our fellow Veterans, and our Department. I Greatly Appreciate ALL that you do – Keep up the Great Work. We are Team Montana – Making a Difference! More importantly, we are a family: American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, Sons of the American Legion,

and Riders. It is a combination of All the Past Department Commanders Themes that remind us of our obligation to the Community, State, and Nation. It is Service Before Self!

Below are five Resolutions that came up in the National Security Commission Meeting and I felt they were important to share. Due to the length of all of them I will have them by Resolution number, Subject, Disposition, and the Final Resolve clause. If you would like to have a copy of these Resolutions to take back to your Districts or Posts, feel free to contact me and I will get those copies to you.

The following Resolutions were presented at the One-Hundred and Fifth Annual National Convention in New Orleans, Louisiana August 27, 28 and 29, 2024.

#### Resolution No. 1

SUBJECT: Support for Concurrent Receipt of Military Retirement Pay and Department of Veterans Affairs Disability for Medically Retired Veterans

Referred to Committee on: National Security

WHEREAS, all medical retirees with qualifying service-connected disabilities should receive the same fair and equitable treatment from a grateful nation, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By the American Legion in National Convention assembled in New Orleans, Louisiana, August 27, 28, 29, 2024, That the American Legion strongly encourages Congress to amend Title 38 and allow medically retired veterans with less than 20 years of credible service, receipt of their military retirement pay concurrently with disability compensation; and be it further

RESOLVED, The Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS), use retirees account statements indicating VA Waiver to determine retirement due to veterans; and be it finally

RESOLVED, DFAS use the provided payment address on retiree account statements to direct deposit military retirement payments to each qualified veteran.

Referred to Standing Commission or Committee

#### Resolution No. 34

SUBJECT: Congressional Commission on Military Recruiting

REFERRED to Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, Efforts to address the recruiting crisis by military leaders have had minimal success and are in need of major overhaul; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By the American Legion in National Convention assembled in New Orleans, Louisiana, August 27, 28, 29, 2024, That the American Legion, fully endorses the creation

and implementation of a Congressional commission to study and address the many factors contributing to the recruiting crisis, including the decline in public trust and willingness to serve in the military; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That members of the Veteran Service Organization community, such as The American Legion, be included as participating members of the Commission.

Received and Recorded

RESOLUTION No. 33

SUBJECT: Addressing the Deportation and Earned Benefits of Honorably Discharged Veterans

REFERRED to Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, legislation has been introduced in Congress since 2016 to rectify this objectionable situation. The bill introduced by Congressman mark Takano passed the House in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress session. The bill failed in the Senate, but Congressman Mark Takano plans to reintroduce it in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress, an

RESOLVED, by The American Legion in National Convention assembled in New Orleans, Louisiana, August 27, 28, 29, 2024, That the American Legion support legislation that would enable the Director of Homeland Security to allow and settle the issue of reparations of those members of the Armed Forces of the United States that were honorably discharged; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the legislation supports the efforts of the Military Members and Veterans Initiative (MMVI), a joint effort of the DHW and the VA to give deported veterans a chance to come home and improve their access to VA benefits.

RESOLVED, that the veterans be provided financial and medical support while waiting for their reparations. The bureaucratic process of Homeland Security controlling their return is completed expeditiously, resulting in the veterans' safe return home.

RESOLVED, that those veterans who were deported for criminal acts, many of whom committed these acts while suffering from PTSD, be investigated appropriately and that their cases be referred to Veteran Treatment Courts or other specialized courts designed to determine if the criminal act was due to mental or psychological disorders acquired as a result of service to our country.

RESOLVED, that the Department of California American Legion supports the latest legislation embodied in HR 7946. The House voted on it in December 2022, and it passed the House but failed in the Senate. It was the latest in a long line of legislation proposed and failed in both houses of Congress.

REFERRED to Standing Commission or Committee

RESOLUTION No. 30

SUBJECT: State Funeral for FINAL Medal of Honor Recipient of the Korean and Vietnam War

REFERRED to Committee on National Security

WHEREAS: only 2 Congressional Medal of Honor Recipients still live from the Korean War and of the 261 Recipients of Vietnam as of today (4 Sept 2023) only 66 are still alive according to Wikipedia, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in New Orleans, Louisiana, August 27, 28, 29, 2024, That to support and endorse the “State Funeral for All Wars,” be requesting the President of the United States designate a state funeral for the last Medal of Honor recipient of Korea and Vietnam as a final salute to the millions of men and women that collectively served in our armed forces during those two wars; and be it finally

RESOLVED, that support be in form of signing the “State Funeral for Veterans for All Wars” national petition asking the President of the United States to authorize a State Funeral for the Final Medal of Honor recipients and a copy of this resolution to the State Funeral for All Wars; Headquarters 1000 North Rampart Street, New Orleans, LA 70116

REFERRED to Standing Commission or Committee on National Security

RESOLUTION No. 27

SUBJECT: Border Security Enforcement

REFERRED to Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, the silence of The American Legion in National Convention assembled in New Orleans, Louisiana, August 27, 28, 29, 2024, That The American Legion immediately announce that The American Legion is opposed to the lack of enforcement of existing border policy/laws.

REFERRED to Standing Commission or Committee on National Security

### **DEPARTMENT VICE-COMMANDER**

**Kim Kay McCarty Martin**

Upon leaving the Department convention in Glasgow, I went to the Membership workshops on 26-27 July in Indianapolis, returning home on the 28th with a better understanding of how membership at the Department level works. Retention of current members is a priority as well as performing Buddy Checks and exercising Be The One.

I spent 5 days at The American Legion booth at the State Fair in Great Falls with North Central Zone Commander Andy Rice and Post 341, talking with people about The American Legion,

selling raffle tickets, and cash calendars. We had a good number of people stop by and I enjoyed talking with them. On the 10th of August, I participated with Post 130 in the Sun Valley Fun Days held in Simms, MT. The American Legion carried the flags at the beginning of the Parade and performed the Colors. For such a small town, there was a lot of people present to enjoy the parade, booths, and ice cream.

Arriving in New Orleans on 22 August for the National Convention, Carol Gruwell (Post 341), Clara "PD" Santopietro (Post 341) and myself participated in National's Community Service Project for 4 hours by putting up a fence and painting a house for a local veteran. I attended training sessions on Saturday, Sunday, and Monday before the Convention kicked off on the 27th of August. I attended and was inducted into ANAVICUS and attended the FODPAL breakfast. It was a great experience and a fun time even though at the end of the Convention on Thursday I was exhausted.

I was at Post 341's booth for the Great Falls Stand Down on the 13th of September and I attended District 8's Fall Meeting on the 21st of September in Vaughn. I also was at a booth with Post 341 at the Great Falls Gun Show from the 27th to the 29th where we sold raffle tickets, cash calendars, and answered questions about The American Legion. I'll be attending MT Legion College on the 24th of October in Helena at Fort Harrison as well as the DEC Fall Conference on the 25th.

I've communicated with Commander Simon via e-mail and phone on numerous occasions as I have done with our Department Adjutant and Erin. I've communicated with our hard-working Zone and District Commanders about membership, and congratulated Posts for their achievements in membership goals.

I put out a challenge for membership that the first Post to reach 65% receives a bag of chocolate. Congratulations to Red Lodge Post for your post in reaching 65% first. I also put out a challenge that the first District to make 65% got a 3 lbs of chocolate, as a fun way to race to that target. Congratulations, with all the hard work and effort from District 5 Posts, Alex Vogl gets the bag of chocolate! I'm challenged now that the first District reaching 75% in membership gets Scouting Popcorn. Let's see who will reach the 75% target first! Good popcorn is hard to find.

I've got another challenge out that will Challenge All Posts – the first post to reach 100% in each District will receive \$100, so put the fire and hard work in to see who makes these membership goals.

## **ZONE COMMANDER – SOUTH CENTRAL**

### **Robert Miller**

To use the line "so the adventure begins", as the newly elected South-Central Zone Commander for the Department. I attended the Department Convention in Glasgow where I was nominated and elected to the position. In July I was able to attend Nationals' membership workshop in Indianapolis where a lot of great information was presented also met a lot of great legionnaires from different states. Some of the information would be great for classes the districts should have during their meetings. Starting in September I attended district meetings for 11, 7, and 9, the overall response for the new format of the fall district meetings was favorable. One thing I'm trying to do is to help the post adjutants to start using

My Legion if they are not using it to do their transmittals and consolidated post reports. Made sure that if they had problems that I would be willing to come to their post and help them. And will continue working on membership as we move forward.

## **ZONE COMMANDER – WESTERN**

### **Linda Cousineau**

I went to the American Legion National Conference as Department Sgt at Arms. By the time I left National Conference, I was voted in as the new Department Western Zone Commander. Unfortunately, it was due to the unexpected passing of William (Bill) White, whom I called my friend and comrade. His are some big shoes to fill.

The first week after National, there was a speech that needed to be put together since two of the three District Commanders asked if I could be the guest speaker at their District Meetings.

I attended District 5 Meeting on Saturday, August 7 in Corvallis at the High School with District Commander Alex Vogal officiating the meeting. They had 8 Posts present out of 12 in the District. Two programs that sounded interesting were the Duck Race and the Devil Pups. Post 68 has been in contact with the Army Reserve and Army National Guard in Missoula concerning opportunities for increasing membership. Several Guest speakers presented; Jamie Somers (Ravalli County Valley Veteran Services), Tor Gudmundersson (Missoula Director Habitat for Humanity), Bill Beans (Hamilton Habitat for Humanity) and myself (Western Zone Commander).

The next Saturday, August 14th, I attended the District 4 meeting in Columbia Falls at the MT Veterans Home location. District Commander Bob Lehman officiated the meeting. Unfortunately, only 5 Posts were present out of 14 in the District. Two were excused. The District finance officer talked about a CD at 5.1% making good money. Post 74 Eureka has sweatshirts and t-shirts with Legion logos for sale. Post 126 Charlo has fatality markers made of powder coated stainless steel, for ease of maintenance as they will never rust. Guest speakers were, Sandy Sonju (local Veterans Affairs Kalispell VSO) and myself.

The next week I was unable to attend the District 6 meeting in Deer Lodge as I had a previous commitment. District Commander Dave Haulman officiated. They had 9 out of 11 Posts attend the meeting. Guest Speaker was Commander Dave Haulman. Past Historian Ray Read announced the new Department historian Jennifer Locks. Boys and Girls State Director, Fred Ferrer, provided a presentation on American Legion Boys and Girls State to be held at Carroll College, June 8-14, 2025.

The main highlights of my speech to the Districts were on the continuing missions of the past and current National Commanders' themes "Be The One to Save A Life", reducing veteran suicide by educating all Legionnaires, the Legion Family and local population in suicide prevention. Let's make the American Legion the go to place for people to seek help, learn about suicide prevention and come to if they have questions. The new National Commander's secondary theme of Loyalty, Unity, and Valor (L.U.V.). I talked about the VA billion-dollar request

and e-mail for action, and my thoughts about The American Legion Family – build a family and then use that family for support, comradery and community engagement.

Phone calls and emails are being done and will continue throughout the year, as well as attending District events as my schedule allows. I also encourage my District Commanders to contact me anytime they need help concerning The American Legion. I am honored to be the Western Zone Commander and Congratulate all three of my Districts for meeting or exceeding the 55% goal and District 5 for already exceeding the 65% goal. Keep up the great work, everyone!

## **ZONE COMMANDER – NORTH CENTRAL**

### **Andy Rice**

After attending the department convention in Glasgow, we hit the ground running with fundraising and recruiting. This year department set up the booth at the state fair in Great Falls. I was joined in manning the booth by members of post 341 and post 26 as well as the department vice commander, Kim Kay McCarty Martin, the department commander, Ken Simon, and the department adjutant Duane Cunningham. We did great with raffle ticket sales and cash calendars as well as recruiting several new members into the local posts in the area. A key change to our dynamic this year was we partnered with MVAD and it served as a distinct one-two punch when it came to reaching veterans in the community and being able to answer questions not only about the American Legion but also assisting with VA claims and information pertaining to the VA.

The next stop was the Chouteau County fair in Fort Benton. I was assisted with the booth at the fair by members of post 102 and although it is a smaller fair and venue overall it was attended and the raffle and cash calendar sales were a hit once again with the community.

I attended the National Convention this year in New Orleans Louisiana and can say it was a memorable experience. It was truly amazing the attendance that was at the convention and the message of the American Legion was conveyed in a passionate and poignant production from all the speakers and the National Commander as well as the thousands of members that attended.

In September I attended the three district meetings in the north central zone. The first was in Malta for district 2. Attendance was good for the meeting and several awards were presented during the meeting to posts within the district. I was also asked to be the guest speaker for the luncheon. District 3 was next in Conrad and although there were only a few posts in attendance there was enough to have a quorum and business was conducted as usual. District 8 was in Vaughn and had good attendance from the posts. The format for the fall meetings was well received in my zone once the reasoning was explained to the members and that the information from department was still going to be disseminated to them all.

## **ZONE COMMANDER – EASTERN**

### **Dave Ofalt**

I attended the Spring convention in Glasgow at the end of June. I was unable to attend the District 1 fall meeting in Plentywood. I informed the department commander. I attended the

fall district meeting for district 10 in Terry. I spoke with a couple of posts in the district about the issues they are having, tried to guide them the best I could without telling them what to do. I have been quite busy this summer, so I didn't get a chance to visit the posts in district 1. As we all know this is a very big state.

I have been keeping up on the operations of the department. Thank you have a wonderful day.

## **NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEEMAN (N.E.C.)**

**Larry Dobb**

### **Key Updates from the National Executive Committee (NEC)**

#### **1. Membership Dues and Revenue Sharing**

- Departments need to inform their members about the \$11.50 per member that is returned from National.
- Of the \$23 annual dues, \$3 is allocated to *The American Legion* magazine.

#### **2. Membership Strategies**

- Efforts to promote multi-year memberships continue. It was noted that the recent \$5 dues increase should have potentially been \$10, given that inflation and other factors mean dues increase typically only sustains financial needs for about seven years.
- Members who recruit three new members will receive the National Commander's coin.

#### **3. Partnerships and Sponsorships**

- The American Legion lost substantial revenue from USAA, attributed to not effectively communicating the extent of USAA's contributions to the organization.
- The Legion is the sole veteran group sponsoring this year's Army-Navy football game and aims to achieve similar publicity success as with the IndyCar sponsorship. Plans are in place to engage the Air Force and Coast Guard in future events.

#### **4. Operational Improvements**

- National is acquiring a state-of-the-art embroidery machine to address issues encountered with external vendors.
- Continuing challenges with the Personify membership management system have resulted in significant costs. The current contract with Personify expires in 2027, and alternative systems are being considered, with a potential replacement estimated at \$7 million for a system to last 25 years.

## 5. Disaster Relief and Assistance

- The National Emergency Fund (NEF) currently has \$6.7 million available to assist with hurricane and tornado damage relief efforts.

## 6. Membership Status

- Membership numbers are currently 36,000 below last year's figures.
- The goal for new members is set at 150,000, with 26,000 new members recruited to date.
- The Sons of The American Legion (SAL) membership stands at over 390,000, with a target of reaching 400,000. Notably, 60% of donations to the Child Welfare Fund come from the SAL.
- Auxiliary President Trish Ward (KS) reported that the Auxiliary's membership is struggling, particularly in small towns, with an aging member base.

## 7. Programs and Events

- The Americanism Youth Shooting Sports Program (YSSP) and Oratory competitions were successfully held at Hillsdale College, which has proven to be a receptive host.
  - The cost of hosting YSSP at Hillsdale was \$26,000, compared to \$74,000 in Colorado Springs.
  - There is potential to relocate the American Legion World Series to Hillsdale, though additional NCAA-compliant ballfields (two to four) would be required in the area. The rising cost of airfare for participating teams is also a consideration.

## 8. National Convention Report

- The addition of High School ROTC Drill Teams to the Drill Team Competition brought in around 17 teams this year. Attending the competition during the convention is highly recommended.
- The Exhibition Hall featured 107 booths, generating \$370,000 in revenue—the highest figure since data collection began in 2004.
- Approximately 8,000 attendees participated in this year's convention.
- The last-minute addition of shuttle buses for the New Orleans convention incurred a cost of \$208,000. This issue is expected to grow as more hotels discontinue their parking garages and valet services. Future attendees may need to rely on off-site parking options. The Montana hotel was conveniently located across the street from the convention center.
- The 105th National Convention was considered very successful. A full report will be presented at the Spring Meeting. The 2024 convention is scheduled for

August 22-28 in Tampa, FL, pending any significant hurricane damage. Indianapolis may serve as a backup location. Bids for the 2031 convention have been submitted by Atlantic City, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh.

#### 9. Compliance and Legal Matters

- The entire NEC participated in Harassment and Diversity Training and signed a form confirming completion.
- The National Judge Advocate (JAG) reported three cases as of October 9, with ongoing issues in Washington and Colorado. Each department needs a key contact to address these matters. Departments should review their constitutions and avoid relying on outdated practices. Investigations by the National JAG will eventually be billed back to the department.

#### 10. Marketing and Communications

- Marketing Chair Evenson (SD) emphasized the importance of distributing "Be The One" toolkits across departments.
- The Media & Communications team focused on three key topics, including suicide prevention. A special cover wrap on *The American Legion* magazine resulted in a one-time \$100,000 increase in sales.
- The Legiontown website continues to receive significant traffic, with plans to add a Department index for easier navigation.

#### 11. Military Engagement and National Security

- The National Security Commission, led by Shuman (SD), completed a visit to the USMC base in Yuma, AZ, and plans to visit Shaw AFB (SC) and Joint Base San Antonio, TX, soon. The base visitation program has helped enhance the Legion's visibility with Congress and the Department of Defense.

#### 12. Historical Achievements

- Historian Jennifer Laux announced the winners of the digital online entries competition: Missouri, Idaho, and Nebraska. Fourteen hard copy entries are still under review.

#### 13. Resolutions and Governance

- All 23 resolutions presented were passed.
- The Department Advisory Committee is working on job descriptions and the transfer of Washington's oversight back from National. In Colorado, conflicts between various groups and IRS issues persist, necessitating a Constitutional Convention and a Special Convention in January 2025. A new constitution could be in place by May 2025, though some resistance remains within certain groups.
- The problem departments are experiencing issues primarily at the department level, not in the Posts or Districts. Departments must operate like businesses to avoid

complications with the IRS, state authorities, and other government agencies. Three individuals faced challenging situations as National employees, and Jim Lish has returned to Wyoming.

#### 14. Cost-Saving Measures

- National has secured a new paper supplier, resulting in a 19% reduction in costs compared to the previous supplier.

#### 15. Future Budget and System Updates

- The 2025 budget includes plans to replace Personify with a custom-built system estimated to cost \$7 million. This new system aims to last 25 years and will allow for necessary updates and changes without being dependent on an external vendor.

### **ALTERNATE NATIONAL COMMITTEEMAN (N.E.C.)**

#### **Glen Sharbono**

I went to the National Convention in New Orleans Louisiana. There were several days of 98° and 98% humidity! I managed to find a couple of restaurants that served catfish and alligator.

The best one was Drago's and the most expensive was Mulate's, both within a fair walking distance from the hotel. The WWII Museum was worth the trip and a must for anyone planning a future trip to NOLA. It was so big you can't see it all in a single day. I was able to see the Mighty Mississippi River, it's a bit nerve-wracking to drive by the retainer wall and realize you are under sea level. I did not go to the French Quarter; I figured there may be too many of my relatives looking for a handout.

Prior to the start of the convention, we were asked to log into [legion.org/legislative](http://legion.org/legislative) and tell our elected officials to pay VA disability payments. So far more than 44,500 legionnaires have done so.

The convention had a lot of great speakers, a couple of Medal of Honor recipients. Most inspirational was the address by National Commander Daniel Seehafer. Most entertaining was the speech by LT General Russel Honore, who oversaw the Hurricane Katarina aftermath 19 years ago. And he had some good LifePoint lessons.

A resolution was passed prior to the start of the Convention to Honor PNC Jake Comer by renaming the NEC room to John P. "Jake" Comer National Executive Room. Had no idea as it was kept very secret, and it was very emotional for him. This was the only resolution presented to the NEC all other were referred back to committee or received and recorded.

It was reported that The Department of Washington had its largest convention in 5 years and now has a new constitution and by-laws, election of new officers. It will get its non-profit status back and a recommendation to the NEC to reinstate the charter.

The Department of Colorado is still working on taxes for 2021-2023. A clear picture is needed of finances before reinstating the charter. They are working on a new constitution and by-

laws. A requirement is the must follow the Department of Massachusetts and must be "Unanimous". Maybe in May a recommendation for the reinstatement of their charter.

The Marketing Commission is working to customize digital services.

Update to the Awards Manual with a new Retention Award.

Seventy-Seven (77) Post Charters were presented to the NEC for cancellation consideration. None from the Department of Montana.

Fifty (50) Squadrons have been submitted and recommended for cancellation during the NEC meeting in NOLA. None from the Department of Montana.

Montana received a National Blood Donor Award for Post participation in Category VI.

#### AMERICANISM COMMISSION

At the 105th National Convention in New Orleans the Americanism Commission met Saturday, August 25th from 0830-1030.

A video of the meeting was recorded and will be released in a few weeks. We watched the "new"

PSA video about our Children & Youth Programs featuring many of the current program champions.

I am not sure when it will be publicly available, but it is one that should be shown at all C&Y functions repeatedly. It can be seen by going to YouTube, searching American Legion and watching day 1 of the 105th National convention. It follows the speech by Britt K. Slabinski, medal of honor recipient and president of the Medal of Honor Society as just 2 hours and 18 minutes into the program (2:17:51)

No Resolutions were presented to the Commission.

C.O.Y.E. (Committee On Youth Education) said 95 applicants for Samsung Scholarship were received for consideration. All applicants will receive \$1,200.00

The Convention Committee of Americanism met again on Sunday, August 24th, 2024, from 0835-0900.

Mark Avis- was elected Chairman of Americanism Commission/Committee.

Michael Donnelly- was elected as Secretary.

Resolution 24- Grommet Recovery During Disposal of American Flags

-Referred to standing Commission for review.

Resolution 29- Education of the Holocaust

-Received and Recorded as Resolution 104 of 1993 already addressed the issue.

Departments are encouraged to promote the following:

100th Anniversary of American Legion Baseball as it is fast approaching.

Celebration of the (Sester Centennial) 250th Birthday of Our Country.

### **PAST DEPARTMENT COMMANDER/AMERICANISM CHAIR**

#### **Lowell Long**

I want to start this by again thanking everyone for their support while I was serving as your Commander for the Department of Montana American Legion. Serving you was a highlight of my time in the American Legion. I appreciated how everyone made me feel welcome at every event I attended while serving as Commander. I will truly value the friendships and help I received from all the Legionnaires in our great Department over the past several years. Thank you for making this a truly enjoyable and memorable experience.

I want to thank everyone in the post in Glasgow for putting on a great convention for us. Being able to share time with National Commander Daniel Seehafer and meet many veterans at the VA event prior to the start of the convention was outstanding. Thank you to Joe and company for all they did to make us feel welcome in Glasgow.

Since wrapping up the Department Convention in Glasgow in June, I have been working on several projects for the American Legion. I started out by attending a tour of the Montana Historical Society Museum and our rooms on the second floor along with Adjutant, Duane Cunningham and Erin Carpenter. They showed us their plans and we identified areas that needed addressed.

I attended an American Legion Baseball game in Havre during the regular season for the Havre Northstars. I had hoped to attend more but wasn't able to with when the games were and my schedule.

I attended the dedication of the statue for Governor Judy Martz in Helena on June 29th along with Duane Cunningham, Bill White, and Kathy Long. It was a crowded event at the Capitol. They put on an excellent program and her statue can be viewed outside the Governor's Office.

I worked at the Great Northern Fair in Havre on August 6-11th. We sold cash calendars and other goods to support the American Legion in North Central Montana. We shared information about the American Legion and got some interest in the Legion in our area.

From there, I traveled to New Orleans, LA for the National Convention of the American Legion. I attended both the Sons of the American Legion Convention and the American Legion Convention. Serving as the Delegation Chairman for this convention was an awesome experience. Kathy and I hosted the Hospitality Room while there. With this being my first experience in New Orleans, I tried to observe and enjoy as much as I could the local atmosphere. One of the highlights of this week was visiting the National WW2 Museum. It was an amazing place. Besides that, I got to visit Kathy's brother, Daryl and his wife, Margret while there. Margret was part of the 9th District Band from Minnesota. I signed Daryl up in the Sons of the American Legion while there. Thank you to all who attended representing Montana at the convention. You were an amazing group to be associated with.

I then attended the Fall District meetings in the North Central Zone. I started with District 2 in Malta. With the District Adjutant not being able to be there, I was asked to fill in as the

acting Adjutant. Jed did an excellent job running the meeting. Next, I went to Conrad to attend the District 3 meeting. Keith had an excellent program with some instruction for the members in attendance. I always enjoy going here as this was where I grew up. Finally, I traveled to Vaughn for the District 8 meeting. They

had a very good meeting. Mike did an excellent job running his meeting. This year, we tried something new where we had all the Zones holding their meetings at the same time and having the Zone Commanders presenting the information from Department. I thought this went well in our area. Zone Commander Andy Rice did an excellent job presenting information and answering questions about what we are doing as a Department.

It was with sadness, that I attended the funeral for Legionnaire, Bill White who passed away unexpectedly. He was an inspiration to all of us who knew him and worked with him over the years. His dedication to the American Legion of Montana was second to none. He always provided valuable advice when asked that was useful and accurate. He will be truly missed by all of us who know him. Rest in Peace, my friend. We will see you on the other side.

I also participated in several funerals in Chinook, rendering honors to those veterans who had passed from our midst. The families are always so appreciative of our being there honoring their loved one's service to our great nation.

I was able to head to Indianapolis accompanying my wife who is the American Legion Auxiliary Girls State Chairman to attend the fall Americanism Committees workshops. I was able to sit in on both the Oratorical and American Legion Boys State programs while there. I also visited with some from the Junior Shooting Sports Program as well but couldn't get into any of their meetings. This year, they started with a joint session on Friday evening for all the programs. Saturday and Sunday saw the different committees meeting in different areas of the hotel. I began Saturday with the Oratorical group. We discussed our programs with an emphasis on how things went at the National Competition on the Campus of Hillsdale College. They were impressed with the facilities there and they are wanting us there. We listened to different programs talking about what was working and what was a challenge running their programs. Getting students involved seems to be the biggest challenge we are all facing with the program. I also went down and sat in on some of the Boys State/Nation meetings. We had two programs that presented about their programs. The first I heard was from Wisconsin. They outlined their program and the positives and challenges they faced. The second was from West Virginia. Both presented an excellent program showing what they did. I was able to pick up some information from it to bring back.

I am currently assisting with the Montana American Legion Boys State and Auxiliary Girls State program with a fundraising event that will be taking place later this year. As the Americanism Chairman for the Department of Montana, I feel that working these great programs is what we should all be doing. Please work to help us recruit boys and girls for all our youth programs. We need students participating in our Oratorical Scholarship Program, the Junior Shooting Sports Program, and attending American Legion Boys State and Auxiliary Girls State. Please help out when asked. Seeing the reaction from these students is very rewarding.

I was able to head to Billings on October 11th to do a presentation to the Girl Scout Troop that my granddaughters are part of on our flag. I shared information on our flag and we

folded the flag. We talked about how to care for the flag and how to display the flag. The girls were very interested with the program and asked a lot of questions. I was able to present each girl with a small flag of their own.

Again, thank you for allowing me to serve the Department of Montana over the past few years. Getting to know all of you and working with you has been a rewarding experience for me. Keep up all the good work you do in your communities. Together, we are the American Legion in Montana.

## **HISTORIAN**

### **Ray Read**

#### **Introduction**

Following my attendance at the 105th National American Legion Convention in New Orleans, Louisiana, I wish to address the importance of post and district histories for Montana American Legion posts. During the 2023-24 Montana Department Convention in Lewistown, no post histories were submitted for the annual history contest, marking the second consecutive year without entries. There is an opportunity for posts to submit histories for the upcoming 2024-25 year in two categories: a one-year post narrative history and a one-year post yearbook.

#### **Importance of Post Histories**

The Department of Montana encourages the preparation of annual post histories to integrate this practice into regular post and district operations throughout the year. Recording post activities is crucial for future reference and adds considerable value. Although most posts do not have professional historians, this should not hinder the proper documentation of post activities. The focus should be on comprehensiveness, readability, and proper arrangement to create both an engaging narrative and a valuable reference source.

#### **Guidance for the 2024-2025 Cycle**

On September 3, 2024, the Office of the National Historian issued guidance for the current cycle:

1. **Annual Report Submission:** The annual report of the Department of Montana's activities should be presented at the Department Convention and a duplicate should be sent to the National Historian in Indianapolis. Contributions from posts, districts, and zones are critical, especially since the Department's travel budget is limited.
2. **Collection and Preservation of Records:** In coordination with the Department Adjutant, I will assist in gathering and preserving records of historical significance, such as convention proceedings and department reports. Historical materials should be categorized for preservation and checked thoroughly before discarding. In case of uncertainty, consultation with the library and museum director is recommended.
3. **Department History Compilation:** The Department Historian should compile a comprehensive history covering the period from the department's inception. With two histories already submitted (1919-1967 and 1967-2000), a third volume for

2001-2025 is due. Assistance from post and district historians will be crucial for completing this edition.

### Resources and Support

The American Legion Officer's Guide and Manual of Ceremonies (61st edition, 2024) is available both in print and online at [www.legion.org](http://www.legion.org). It provides updated guidance on history preparation formats.

### Department and National History Contests

The Department will hold its annual history contest for 2025, with entries due by the first day of the 2025 Department Convention. Categories include digital and hardcopy submissions, with a best practice showcase for digital entries available online and hard copies displayed at the National Convention. Information on the contest and post showcase will be provided soon; posts are encouraged to start gathering materials.

### Recognition and Communication

Congratulations to posts utilizing news and social media to connect with members and the community. Regular communication on events and opportunities is beneficial. Posts are encouraged to submit their events for inclusion in The Montana Legionnaire.

### Additional Updates and Resolutions

- The 45th Annual POW-MIA Recognition Day and related items from the 65th Montana Legislative Assembly, including SJ0017 and SJ0018 resolutions, recognize military service and commemorate significant events in Montana's military history.
- Department Resolutions from the 104th Convention:
  - Resolution 23-06: Supports the America 250 Commission for the semi quinentennial celebration of the Declaration of Independence.
  - Resolution 23-01: Nominates R. Klose for National Vice Commander, representing District 6.

### America's 250th Birthday Celebration Planning

The Department Historian is researching Montana's participation in the nation's 200th birthday to develop a plan for the America 250 celebration culminating on July 4, 2026. More information will be published in an upcoming digital edition of The Montana Legionnaire.

### Conclusion

This report emphasizes the need for Montana posts to actively prepare and submit their histories for 2024-2025. Proper documentation not only preserves the legacy of the American Legion but also educates and connects current and future members. Assistance is available for those who need it, and I look forward to supporting the continued engagement of veterans and their families.

For additional help, please contact me at [myfun51@msn.com](mailto:myfun51@msn.com) or (406) 458-9847.

## **LEGION RIDERS**

### **Brian Carpenter**

The American Legion Riders (ALR) program officially kicked off at the Department level in Montana during the summer of 2024. We had the goal of uniting our established chapters from across the Department who's members are all motorcycle enthusiasts who are committed to supporting veterans, their families, local posts and communities. And while the program has generated significant interest and growth, the launch has not been without its challenges.

### **Challenges Faced During the Launch**

Chapter 4 Billings has experience organizational setbacks, making it difficult to establish a fully functioning ALR chapter moving forward. These issues, which include member coordination and administrative processes, have delayed progress. Similar challenges have been encountered across the Department, where other chapters struggle with consistent communication and operational structure as it pertains to the new SOP.

### **Strengthening Communication and Planning Efforts**

To address these challenges, we have initiated monthly Director Zoom meetings to enhance communication and provide a platform for sharing updates and addressing concerns. These meetings aim to improve connectivity and cohesion between chapter Directors which in turn elicits leadership buy in for Department goals and streamline the flow of information.

In addition to enhancing communication, we are actively planning two major initiatives: a Legacy Fundraiser to support the children of fallen service members and a Department ride to bring together riders from across Montana. Both events will help build camaraderie and raise awareness for the ALR program.

In addition to the monthly Zoom meeting the ALR has implemented a quarterly membership status worksheet to try and accurately track membership. There is estimated to be between 125 and 175 Legion Riders in 10 Chapters. Since Department Convention we have grown from 9 to 10 Chapters and the reporting chapters have all reported additional new members.

### **Ongoing Reporting Issues**

However, despite these efforts, our membership numbers remain questionable due to a persistent issue: Some chapters and individuals are simply not responding or recognizing the Department level ALR leadership. This lack of engagement complicates and restrains efforts to get an accurate count of membership and overall department wide cohesion and highlights the very reason there was a need to implement a department SOP. Efforts are ongoing to encourage responsiveness and accountability across all chapters.

## **Moving Forward**

While challenges persist, our commitment to the growth and success of the American Legion Riders in Montana remains steadfast. By continuing monthly Zoom meetings, pushing forward with our planned events, and addressing the reporting difficulties, we aim to build a strong network of ALR chapters that can effectively support our shared mission.

The path forward includes tackling these initial setbacks with resilience and ensuring that all chapters are actively involved and contributing to the program's overall success. Clarifying and implementing additions to the SOP with chapter participation.

Additionally, the ALR in Montana will be looking to implement chapter awards in the near future such as Rider of the Year and Mileage Champion of the year and will in turn be put in for selection at the Department level for those awards to be chosen from the winners of the chapter level awards.

The ALR future is looking bright!

### **DEPARTMENT ADJUTANT**

#### **Duane Cunningham**

The last few month have been busy with National Convention, preparations for Department Fall Conference and the 2024/2025 National Commanders visit, changing locations of American Legion Boys and American Legion Auxiliary Girls State, the 2024 Membership Conference, and the National Fall Conference in Indianapolis.

The National Convention was held in New Orleans in late August, as 32 representatives of the Montana American Legion descended on the Big Easy. A lot of American Legion business was completed throughout the week and a new National Commander was installed as James A. LaCoursiere, Jr became the American Legions 106th National Commander. Commander LaCoursiere initiative remains as the "Be the One" campaign designed to bring Veteran suicide awareness to the forefront of Veteran issues. The American Legion's "Be The One" campaign aims to raise awareness about the veteran suicide rate and empower everyone to take the initiative to save the life of a veteran who is at risk.

In a very strange year, there was only one (1) Resolution passed at the 105th National Convention; of the many that were brought forward, including Montana's two were all referred for further study. The resolution that did pass at the 105th National Convention, was Resolution No. 10: "Post-Secondary Credit for Military Service," originating from South Dakota and was heard by the convention's Veterans Employment & Education Committee.

It calls on all colleges and universities to work with the Department of Defense to develop and implement a framework for assessing military training and experience for college credit. It urges Congress to enact legislation requiring colleges and universities that receive federal

funding to adopt policies that recognize the educational value of military service and provide the appropriate credit in accordance with the American Council on Education.

Some interesting resolutions were referred back for further study, including Resolution No. 16: "Investigation of Anthrax Vaccinations." the resolution calls for federal agencies to investigate the anthrax shot given to troops during the Persian Gulf War, whether deploying or staying on base. The shot was given to about 10,000 civilians after the 9/11 attacks, when menacing anthrax-laced letters killed five and sickened 17. Resolution No. 17 also was referred that called for the removal of language in the Legion's Officer's Guide & Manual of Ceremonies that separates female cap practices from males. Resolution No. 20 "Compensation for Veterans Requiring Hearing Aids for Service-Connected Hearing Loss" was referred to the VA&R Commission for further study. It called for amending the VA's rating schedule to ensure veterans with service-connected hearing loss who require hearing aids receive a minimum rating of 40 percent.

This year's Fall District meetings ran differently as the Department Adjutant did not travel to all 11 meetings unless specifically requested. The intent was to meet both the requests of the Districts and allow the District Commanders to have full control and responsibility of their own District Meeting. The feedback received after all the meetings were concluded was very positive as most Districts reported that while it was different not having Department there, it also seemed to allow more open discussion and the sharing of information and ideas. There were a couple of comments about "Department" not being in attendance, but I remind everyone that Department was present, as all Department Executive Board members are "Department", the only person not there was the Department Adjutant.

On a different topic, the Nutter Shore Trophy Hall on the third floor of the Veteran's and Pioneers Building in Helena is set to reopen in the spring. The Montana Historical Society's grand opening is scheduled for May of 2025, I do have some concerns with the current administrations continual efforts to remove the historical significance and purpose of the building and the sacrifices of the Veterans who built it. We may have a future legal fight on our hands as the Montana Historical Society continues to squeeze the Veteran Service Organizations out of a building that has our name on it.

At the 2024 Department Convention, a resolution passed to retire the Montana Legionnaire in its current format. Beginning in November, the Legionnaire will transition to a monthly online paper emailed out to every Legion Family member and to all American Legion Posts for those members who don't have access to the internet. This change will allow us to more readily inform our members of current events, news and happenings within the Department. The biggest reason for the change was due to the overall cost of printing and mailing a newspaper. The hope is that going digital will be in the best interests of our members and allow us to use the digital version of the Legionnaire as a recruiting tool for future members.

I just returned from Fall Conference in Indianapolis as two days of meetings and trainings were held. Montana's representatives were the Department Commander, NEC, Adjutant, SAL NEC and the Children and Youth Program committee chair. It appears that while the National Headquarters expect a break-even budget for the first time in a few years, they have done it through both an increase in membership which is good, and a decrease in staffing and a transition of workload to the Department level, which is bad. The Departments are already overtaxed with responsibilities and reports formally completed by National staff, and this appears to be a continuing practice.

With all the things going on, I want to continue to stress the importance of our programs and what impact they make within our communities. Please support the fundraisers of the American Legion, our Cash Calendar and Big K programs, in addition to our 2024 cornhole boards and Canoe raffles, these are the lifeblood of our programs. I close this report on a somber note as while I attended and enjoyed the National Convention in New Orleans, it was also the first convention without my partner in crime. You are dearly missed Mr. Bill White.

### **CHAPLAIN**

#### **Dorothy Goodwin**

Since this is my first report as Department Chaplain for the Department of Montana and the report book for fall conference, the first thing I would like to do is give my condolences to Bill White's family, the former Department Chaplain. Bill will be miss by many legionaries and especially by me, for all that he did for the Department of Montana and the American Legion.

I have the honor of having former Department of Montana American Legion Chaplain Chaya Semple as my go to person for any questions I might have for this position.

I would like to encourage all Chaplains in the Montana American Legion to take the "Be the One" course online from [mylegion.org](http://mylegion.org) website.

I would like to have contact with all post chaplains if possible. If feel we should help each other out in any way possible.

There is a requirement that each post or district have a Four Chaplains Ceremony each year and report the date and time to the Department so that information can be forwarded to the National Chaplain. Not all posts are going to be able to do one work with other nearby post to do one or do a district one at a central location. A guide for conducting the Four Chaplains Ceremony can be found in the Chaplains Handbook. Once you have done this ceremony, please report it to me and/or to the Department Office Manager so a complete list can be sent forward.

The Department ceremony will be held at the post chapel on 2 February 2025 in Polson at 2:00 PM. The location in Polson is yet to be determined. My email is [dotgood@yahoo.com](mailto:dotgood@yahoo.com) and my phone number is 406-291-1354, I can also be reached at my post email [hardwickpost112@gmail.com](mailto:hardwickpost112@gmail.com).

Take care, call me if you need any help as I am still learning this job also.

## **SERVICE OFFICER/ VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION**

### **Eric Beal**

I attended my first convention in New Orleans in August and being down there for only a few days, I was very busy and impressed with the Committee meetings I attended. The VA &R Committee does a lot for Veteran issues, and I look forward to becoming more involved in it. In September the American Legions "System Worth Saving" group visited VA Montana and listened at length to concerns and issues within the VA Healthcare system. Attendance was a low at the Town Hall, but the VA&R Committee members in attendance heard both positive and negative comments and inquiries, the 18 October issue of the VAR Weekly report is below as it mentions the visit to Montana.

#### **VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION WEEKLY UPDATE Ending — 10/18/2024** **Health Policy Team (HPT) Operations Meetings:**

- October 9: HPT attended meetings with the Women Veterans Program and Telehealth teams from the Fort Harrison Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) to identify challenges and best practices. These meetings were a continuation of the Montana System Worth Saving site visit.
- October 9: HPT attended a meeting on Capitol Hill with Representative Molinaro to discuss creating original legislation to address the telehealth needs of veterans living overseas.
- October 10: HPT attended a meeting with the Partnership to Advance Cardiovascular Health (PACH) about the cardiovascular health of veterans and how to work together to help veterans suffering from cardiovascular illnesses such as hypertension.'
- October 11: HPT met with Dr. Erik Vilen of Helena, a former physician at the Helena VA who has led a local Montana movement calling for accountability at the VA. Meeting discussed issues about the Helena VA and how to help address them.
- October 15: HPT attended the monthly Toxic Exposures in the American Military (TEAM) Coalition and were given a presentation from Disabled American Veterans (DAV) and Military Officers Association of America (MOAA entitled: Ending the Wait for Toxic-Exposed Veterans A post-PACT Act Blueprint for Reforming the VA Presumptive Process.
- October 16: HPT attended the PTSD Consultation Program Lecture Series presented by the Department of Veterans Affairs. • October 17: Deputy Director for Health Policy (DDHP) attended the VetResources Community Network Office Hours. The meeting highlighted VA Buddy Check initiatives and how organizations like Vets4Warriors and Together We Served are assisting this effort.
- October 17: HPT attended Future of VA Healthcare Roundtable at the DAV National Headquarters.

#### Legislative Bill Reviews:

- H.R. X – Naloxone Bill To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a pilot program on the provision of naloxone to veterans and their caregivers, and for other purposes.

Position: Support

Supporting Resolutions: Resolution No. 1: Be the One Mental Wellness Committee and Resolution No.160: Complementary and Alternative Medicine.

### **PARLIAMENTARIAN**

#### **Eric Dryden**

I want to extend my sincere appreciation to the American Legion of Montana for allowing me to serve as your 2024 – 2025 Parliamentarian and thank you for the opportunity.

As this is my first report, there is little to relate as everything is running smoothly with the Executive Committee and the Department currently. There are no known concerns or issues to relate, and I look forward to meeting you all during our upcoming fall conference in Helena later this month.

Adherence to Robert's Rules of Order during our upcoming meeting benefits each of us by ensuring:

- Justice and courtesy for all,
- Maintenance of order,
- Consideration of one item at a time,
- All sides get heard,
- Ability for each member to provide input,
- Majority rule, and
- Protection of the rights of all members including the minority.

### **FINANCE OFFICER**

#### **Lonnie Cook**

The American Legion Department of Montana finance committee reviewed and approved the adjustments to the 2025 operating budget on 2 Oct 2024. The 2025 budget was adjusted to show changes to moving the department convention from Canada to Helena and scholarship payouts. The committee voted and approved to keep \$10k in the Oratorical scholarship account for 2025.

Dave Ashby from Stockman Bank Wealth Management Team briefed us on our current wealth management portfolio during the 2 Oct 2024 Finance Committee meeting. Currently we are roughly 40% bonds and CDs (fixed income) with long term locked in percentage rates, and 60% in S&P 500 stocks (Equities) that pay out dividends. He recommended no change to our portfolio as we have locked in some good interest rates, and most of our equities pay

dividends. Still looking good on making good returns in interest/dividends in 2025. However, dock strikes, and geopolitical environment could change our outcome a little.

On 2 July, per the resolution 24-06 (Resolution Concerning the Endowment) the department moved \$21,639.08 of endowment funds into the Department Operational Checking account and remaining \$11,106,72 of funds into the stockman wealth management non-sweep cash account. If future endowment funds are received, the funds will be placed back into a pending approved operational endowment account at that time.

We have transitioned to the new online QuickBooks, the accounts have been reduced down to three accounts; American Legion of Montana, American Legion Boy State, and Sons American Legion Montana. For each account, the finance officer and chairman for these programs have online read only access to all reports for better transparency. We are allowing our committee members access, so the Department of Montana will avoid what happened to the Department of Idaho.

Our current tax accountant is reluctant to use the new online system for payroll and taxes, so we will be moving to a new tax accountant, the beginning of January 2025. This new tax accountant is currently being utilized by many businesses around Montana and will provide additional services we currently are not receiving.

## **JUDGE ADVOCATE**

### **Tim Fox**

Greetings to all my Legionnaire friends and colleagues. As some of you know, I was unable to join you at the summer convention because I was in France to attend the dedication of a memorial to my Uncle Jack and his fellow B-17 bomber air crew members who were KIA (and one POW) on June 22, 1944. The memorial was dedicated on June 22, 2024, in Epagne-Epanette France on the 80th anniversary of the B-17 being shot down by flak. There were 52 American family members of the crew present at the dedication, and the French government declared the dedication to be an official D-Day 80th Anniversary event. There were over 500 people at the event, including a French Foreign Legion honor guard. My Air Force Veteran brother Capt. Richard Fox (DFC), and my Uncle Jack's great nephew, Army Lt. Col. Brandon Merkley, were two of the speakers at the event. We traveled to the American Cemetery in Normandie two days later and the families eulogized the five crew members, including Uncle Jack, who are buried there.



## THOMAS MANN POST 81 LEGION PARK LITIGATION

Over the summer I have monitored the litigation between Post 81 and the Knudsen Family Limited Partnership over the continuing failure of Attorney General Austin Knudsen's family to allow access to Legion Park. On August 7, 2024, Attorney General Knudsen's father, Miles Knudsen, and the Knudsen Family Partnership were found in contempt of court and ordered to pay Post 81 \$45,158.75 for the repair and reopening of Post 81's easement road which the Knudsen family had destroyed and blocked despite a September 7, 2021 final judgment ordering that the road be opened.

## NATIONAL COMMANDER'S VISIT TO THE FALL CONFERENCE

For the last month or so, I have assisted the Department in attempting to secure meetings for the National Commander with Governor Greg Gianforte and with the Montana National Guard TAG, Major General Pete Hronek. Unfortunately, both the Governor and General Hronek are unavailable, but we did secure a meeting with Governor Gianforte's military and veteran policy advisors.

## FRADULENT E-MAILS

Like many of you, I continue to receive bogus e-mails from individuals posing as either former Commanders Lowell Long, and Glen Sharbono, or legitimate companies. The bogus e-mails that I receive purportedly from past Commanders are now more sophisticated in that they more closely mirror actual e-mail addresses. The other bogus e-mails look like invoices for services or products from companies like PayPal, Microsoft, and McAfee. These e-mails typically have the words "Thank you for your order" in the subject line. If you receive e-mails like this, it is best to delete them and do not click on any links, call any phone numbers, or reply to the e-mail. I have recommended in the past that our members' and officers' contact information not be listed on the Department's web site. However, you will recall during a recent Montana legislative session one of our members shared the Department's member list including e-mail addresses with an outside lobbying group. So, it is possible that the Department's member list could perpetually be in the "Dark Web" and available to scammers and fraudsters for years to come. This underscores the importance of members adhering to Department policy prohibiting the sharing of Department or Post member lists with anyone who is not a member of The American Legion, Department of Montana.

## LABOR AUDIT FOLLOW-UP

I continue to work with the Adjutant and members of the finance committee to address past problems with how the Department handled overtime pay for staff. I have participated in Zoom and in-person meetings to come up with a plan to remedy past problems, and to avoid problems in the future. I helped the Department to retain Helena attorney, Mike Talia, to assist with legal advice. Mr. Talia is the former JAG of the Montana National Guard, and he has offered to provide the Department with legal services pro bono (for free).

## POTENTIAL REVISIONS TO THE DEPARTMENT CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS

I continue work with the Constitution and Internal Affairs Committee of the DEC tasked with reviewing our Department Constitution and By-Laws to determine if revisions should be recommended to the full membership during the Spring 2025 meeting. The Committee has

delegated responsibilities for reviewing the documents to make suggestions, and we have scheduled additional meetings over the next four months. If any of our members have suggestions on potential revisions, please e-mail the Department Commander, Ken Simon, and copy me, Richard Klose, and Adjutant Duane Cunningham.

## **SERGEANT-AT-ARMS**

### **Bob Brewer**

As the newly appointed Sergeant-at-Arms, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for entrusting me with this important role. While there have been no specific duties for me to perform so far, I look forward to actively serving the post and working closely with all members to uphold the traditions and values of the American Legion.

I would like to remind everyone that any fines collected serve a greater purpose, as they contribute to the welfare of our Legion and the programs that benefit veterans, their families, and the broader community. It is my commitment to ensure that these funds are used to support the good work that we do as an organization.

I appreciate the support and guidance from the leadership and members as I continue to learn the responsibilities of this position. I am excited to work with you all in the upcoming activities and events.

## **EDUCATION & TRAINING**

### **Jeff Holmes**

Congratulations to all of the following winners within their respective divisions. I would also like to thank all of the posts for sponsoring these contests as part of their post objectives. It is a great way to promote the constitution and government to our youth. They were all great entries. My cap goes off to you for all that you do. Thank You!

### **2024 Winners!**

#### **High School Essay – 6 submitted**

|                 |                                   |                            |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> | Ashley Carpenter @ East Helena HS | Helena Post #2             |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> | James Stuart @ Hamilton HS        | Ravalli Post #47, Hamilton |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> | Zane Muhlenberg @ Lockwood HS     | Andrew Pearson Post #117   |

#### **Junior High School Essay – 7 submitted**

|                 |                                        |                            |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> | Brooklyn Cary @ Home School            | Ravalli Post #47, Hamilton |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Matthew McFarland @ Clinton Elementary | Clinton Post #83           |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> | Bricklin McDonald @ Twin Bridges JH    | Dan Brockman Post #31      |

#### **Government Survey for Junior High 7<sup>th</sup> Grade – 1 submitted**

|     |                                  |                           |
|-----|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1st | Ryder Reynolds @ Twin Bridges MS | 70% Dan Brockman Post #31 |
| 2nd | None Submitted                   |                           |
| 3rd | None Submitted                   |                           |

#### **Government Survey for Junior High 8<sup>th</sup> Grade – 5 submitted**

|                 |                                            |     |                           |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------|-----|---------------------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> | Brooks Voldseth @ White Sulphur Springs JH | 90% | WSS Post #25              |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Hannah Braaten @ Sheridan JH               | 86% | Anderson-Simpson Post #89 |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> | Daniel Quigley @ North Star JH             | 68% | Liberty County Post #88   |

**Government Survey for High School Seniors – 4 submitted**

|     |                              |     |                       |
|-----|------------------------------|-----|-----------------------|
| 1st | Martin Fulbright @ CJI HS    | 71% | Chester Post #88      |
| 2nd | Allie Dale @ Twin Bridges HS | 70% | Dan Brockman Post #31 |
| 3rd | Nathan Rusk @ Corvallis HS   | 67% | Corvallis Post # 91   |

On the senior survey, Questions #4 & #6 were bad so I credited all contestants with both correct.

Keep up the work with our students and schools. What you do matters!

I work for you, so please let me know what I can do to make your job easier. Congrats to all the winners!

**DISTRICT COMMANDERS**

**DISTRICT 1 - COMMANDER**

**Jerry Davenport**

District #1 is comprised of 13 Posts with a combined membership of 490 members.

District #1 is one of the largest geographical in size Districts in the State of Montana. Spanning from the Missouri River on the south boundary to the Canadian border on the north. North Dakota is the east border and the west county line of Valley County is the west boundary. This remote and sparsely populated area has been designated as the “Middle of Nowhere” by several national news media sources. In spite of this, District #1 hosted the Department State Convention. Under the enthusiastic and determined leadership of Past District #1 Commander Joe Yeoman, local resources and businesses were coordinated and used to organize this event so that it ran as smoothly as anywhere. The coordinated efforts of the local businesses, city and county resources and the wide open spaces of NE Montana, gave the event and the attending members the opportunity to enjoy the wide open spaces and the recreational aspects of Fort Peck Lake. The participation of the members of the District reflects the pride in our District.

While many of the District #1 Posts are comprised of more senior aged members, it is surprising how they all still remain motivated and participated in many of the local community events. From the sponsorship of baseball and softball teams to helping with the commemoration of Veterans Day and Memorial Day to 4<sup>th</sup> of July cookouts and picnics the individual Posts have displayed a commitment toward the ideals of the American Legion. The constant efforts to recruit high school students to attend Boys and Girls State have resulted in not only positive feedback, but it is with pride that we have two of our recent graduated

that are in attendance at the U.S. Army Academy at West Point, N.Y. and the other is in the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, MD. This commitment serves as a reminder to the public of the service, past and present that our membership displays as a positive reminder of our service to this great country.

I am honored to be included in these civic displays and I am quite pleased to the Commander of District #1.

## **DISTRICT 2 - COMMANDER**

### **Jed Damson**

After the American Legion Convention getting packets out sometimes can be a job. At our District 2 meeting I handed out awards to all the Posts that made the 90% retention for the 2024 membership year. It was a very good year making the top District award as well that they all shared in. We will see what this next year will bring for numbers. It may also inspire the other Districts to strive for that goal.

Working with these 9 Posts has been a pleasure sometimes challenging but when asking they do perform and get the job done.

I participated in the 9/11 ceremony that Post 11 Riders put on with a Ride out to Beaver Creek with escort of the Montana Highway Patrol.

I am hopeful to get more Posts working the programs for the 2025 year. I have placed a challenge out to my Posts to exceed the membership goals that were assigned to them and I am positive they will all rise to the challenge.

## **DISTRICT 3 - COMMANDER**

### **Keith Stark**

I recently read a couple articles in our small-town newspaper. Newspapers are having struggles being viable, so our local one covers several towns in the area. Post #73 in our District had an article about honoring a local veteran with the Governor's award. He was one of 39 earning that award. Post #73's Auxiliary had a sophomore recognized for an essay he wrote on patriotism, winning first place at District, State, and National. They were also spotlighting the two American Legion Auxiliary delegates of this past year's Girls State. Post #73 has the largest membership in our District and I believe their community visibility is one of the important reasons for their Post's strength.

I am working on a charter removal of a Post. Basically, the issue that came about was the lack of officers to administer the Post. This did not happen on my watch, but became part of my responsibility as I assumed my duties as District Commander. To be honest, I thought hard about kicking this can down the road, as my previous District Commanders had so successfully done. At our last District meeting, we came up with a consensus on what to do about the Post we were considering for charter removal.

At that meeting I also brought up the need of attention on Posts with single leaders, attempting to handle all the administrative needs of their Post. We have three Posts in our District with single aging leaders. The oldest is in his eighties, and the other two aren't far behind. These leaders have spent years dedicated to their Post, so I know they must care. It

is frustrating as I have repeatedly asked them to find willing leaders within their Post. Usually, the response is that nobody wants to do it. I understand it will take effort, but I believe it is possible for two of the three Posts. The other Post has more limited options as membership is directly related to the economic base of its community.

As those who use mylegion for membership processing know, within an hour, a potential adjutant could easily be trained to be a basic user. In previous meetings I have talked about the benefits of cheaper faster transmittals, as well as important reports that would be readily accessible. This year another speaker at the meeting attempted to reinforce the benefits. As I looked over glazed eyes, I am convinced some are privately thinking of how they have used the previous methods for years and see no real need to consider change.

Many times, I have heard about how we used to have this or I remember when. Change is inevitable depending on circumstance. Some communities look so much different than they did fifty years ago. Community population shift and economic opportunities have had a significant impact. Social norms fifty years ago don't resemble those currently in use. Today, cell phones, email, and social media are widely used.

I certainly believe in preserving core values and honored traditions of the American Legion, and how they are well worth fighting for. Our world is rapidly evolving and I believe as leaders of the American Legion, we have the obligation to be ever cognizant of change or risk becoming irrelevant, with declining organization interest.

#### **DISTRICT 4 - COMMANDER**

##### **Bob Lehman**

At the 2024 American Legion Department of Montana Convention I handed out Post Packages to Post#74 Eureka, Post#112 Polson, Sons of the American Legion Package Squadron#112 Polson, Post#126 Charlo, Post#138 Ronan and Post#426 Lakeside. These packages were delivered and signed for before leaving convention. Robert Shaw, District #4 Finance Office, Home Post#126 Charlo signed for Post Packages at convention to be hand-delivered to Post#52 Thompson Falls and Post#129 Paradise. Glenn Sharbono, District #4 Oratorical Chairman, Home Post#138 Ronan signed for Post Packages at convention to be hand-delivered to Post#106 St. Ignatius and Post#113 Arlee.

Remaining Post Packages - Post#72 Columbia Falls, Post#86 Bigfork, Post#72 Libby and Sons of the American Legion Package Squadron#72 Libby, Post#108 Whitefish, and Post#137 Kalispell were hand-delivered (July 3 to July 10, 2024) by District #4 Commander, Home Post #137 Kalispell. Completed American Legion Department of Montana required signature form and mailed original to Department HQ.

District Commander Post Visitations:

Posts #52, #72, #74, #86, #97, #106, #108, #112, #113, #126, #129, #137, #138 and #426

Post Visitations for posts started on July 9, 2024 with Post#72 Columbia Falls and continued to Post#108 Whitefish September 19, 2024.

District Commander Visit and Support:

Fourth of July Independence Day at Fred Young Park, Plains, Montana, District #4 Commander and Local Post#52 Thompson Falls Post Commander presented American

Legion Department of Montana Firefighter of the Year award to Plains-Paradise Rural Fire District Fire Chief James Russell.

Columbia Fall Heritage Day July 24, 2024. Post#72 Columbia Falls provide burgers and hot dogs during the Car Show at Marantette Park, using donations for a fundraiser event and membership drive.

District Fall Meeting

Met with Host Post#72 Columbia Falls August 12, 2024 to review and provides guidelines for District#4 Fall Meeting. Held District Fall Meeting September 14, 2024 with five (5) out of fourteen (14) posts in attendance.

## **DISTRICT 5 - COMMANDER**

**Alex Vogel**

District #5 is comprised of twelve Posts with a combined membership goal of 1,259 veterans.

I'm proud to say that as of this date District 5 is the leading District in achieving their membership goal. This is the result of the motivation, commitment and dedication of each Post's effort to further the cause of the American Legion.

District 5 meets monthly, the central location being in Missoula. These monthly meetings are a carryover from the M&PA (Membership & Post Activities) counsel of the past and are well attended by Post Officers, or their representative members. These meetings provide a forum for the exchange of information, projects and ideas, allows for open discussion; and gives me the opportunity to provide or direct support.

Each Post has its own, unique personality. They're confident, independent, loyal and welcoming, and each is involved in their community in various ways.

We have Posts supporting everything from local Food Banks to the FFA (Future Farmers of America). From Youth Shooting Sports to Essay contests. From Amateur Radio Emergency Response to Veteran's Relief programs; From classic car clubs to storm damage cleanup. This list is endless and very impressive.

Personally, I'm pleased to have introduced Habitat for Humanity's veteran's outreach program of "Repair & Restore" to our Legion community.

I've been honored to attend Post's meetings, breakfasts, luncheons, picnics and barbeques.

It's truly an honor and privilege to serve as the Commander of District 5.

## **DISTRICT 6 - COMMANDER**

### **Dave Haulman**

I have been working with posts 20, 21 and 42 to conduct a resource fair in April and May of 2025

The Wall that Heals was set up in Butte. All veterans' organizations volunteered to support the wall. It was estimated that several thousand veterans and their families within a five-state area visited the wall. Special Thanks goes out to Sgt. Mike Tappken and his staff for organizing this important event.

Resource fairs bring several Veteran Organizations to help veterans with claims, medical information, suicide prevention, at risk vets who are homeless or face the possibility of being homeless, Job opportunities food pantries as well as other resources to help veterans. This is also a great place to mention membership benefits of joining the American Legion, AML Auxiliary, Sons of the American Legion and the Legion Riders.

The District 6 Oratorical will be held at Post 1 in Butte 2025 Date TBD.

The District is really trying to present AML Boy's State, AML Auxiliary Girl's state, Oratorical and Americanism in the schools.

## **DISTRICT 7 - COMMANDER**

### **Dan Smart**

District 7 has been extremely busy since the State Convention. Ten of the eleven Posts had programs on July 4th this summer, Post 23 and Post 65 both had their local rodeos and parades that weekend. Post 23 fed lunch to any contestant during the NRA rodeo held that weekend. Post 65 uses the weekend to do most of their yearly fundraising during the local rodeo. All Posts are very active in their communities monthly with various programs and fundraisers.

The Fall District meeting was held at Post 19, Big Timber where six of the eleven posts were represented. The meeting was well represented with multiple members from each post that was present. Each Commander, or Officer present, gave a brief synopsis of post activities that had taken place since the spring meeting. All of the posts had a function over Memorial Day weekend, individually or in concert with other local posts such as those in the Gallatin Valley. Members were very involved in the discussion throughout the meeting and provided lots of input that was valuable. All were pleased with the new format and happy to provide input and suggestions when other members asked questions. Big discussion was around the topic of membership and presence in the community. I believe all were happy with the discussion and direction of the meeting.

Big push by the district will be in renewing interest in Post 78, West Yellowstone. Myself, District Vice and a couple other local post commanders have expressed interest in helping 78 get active again.

## **DISTRICT 8 - COMMANDER**

### **Michael Allison**

It has been a slow summer since most of district 8 posts are busy working in the fields harvesting. The district did have their fall meeting and it was very productive even without the department attending the event. There were some initial grumblings but by the end everyone was extremely happy.

## **DISTRICT 9 - COMMANDER**

### **Dean Martin**

This summer, our newly elected district commander resigned due to time constraints. Having served as a post-service officer, I initially lacked the experience most district commanders usually have when starting in this position. My zone commander, Rob Miller, assured me he would assist with anything I needed. However, I decided to try handling things on my own.

I managed to submit all the reports and requests that Erin informed me about, most of which were submitted on time. I can only imagine there were more than a few eye rolls on her end of the phone during our conversations. I view lost opportunities rather than made mistakes as my view so far.

Our fall meeting was a new experience since the state officers were not in attendance. This absence, I believe, will prove beneficial, allowing more grassroots ideas to come forward. It will require extra preparation from district commanders, but it also presents an opportunity for us to guide a sometimes hesitant group in taking responsibility and identifying the needs of veterans in each post. This aligns more closely with the original vision of our organization: veterans helping and addressing the needs of fellow veterans. I want to assure you that service officers will play a crucial role in this effort, providing a strong support system for our organization.

I am enrolled in American Legion College this fall, which I believe, along with sharing ideas at the state fall meeting, will equip me with the knowledge I need. Visiting each post this winter will also help me approach the planning of our next district meeting more effectively.

## **DISTRICT 10 - COMMANDER**

### **Irene Dickerson**

The 2024 Spring Conference for District 10 was held on April 13th, 2024, at Post 5 in Miles City, MT. The Women Veteran's symposium was discussed at the Spring Conference, and the district received a donation for the event. The post packets were given to the Post commanders in attendance. The packets were mailed to the post commanders and/or adjutants who could not attend. The Fall conference was held on September 14th, 2024, at Post 32 in Terry, MT. During the last year, I attended post meetings at Post 39 in Forsyth, MT, Post 32 in Terry, MT, and Post 28 in Glendive, MT. During the year, the posts kept in contact with the district officers, and no significant issues were noted.

## **DISTRICT 11 - COMMANDER**

### **Richard Klose**

After attending the department convention in Glasgow (which was a great convention, a great job by the hosts), I attended the American Legion membership workshop in Indianapolis in July. Since 2014, except for Covid year 2020 I have attended the workshop either as a district commander, a department vice commander, a department commander or a member of the national Membership and Post Activities committee. Last year and this year the information that was shared was great. In the first years that attended we received a lot of hard copy material, the last 2 or 3 years that has stopped and everything is put online. This can be viewed by going to the mylegion web page. With all the changes that the nation is making, in the near future EVERYTHING will be by computer. With all the information given at the breakout sessions I believe it is important for our Dept Cmdr., Dept Vice Cmdr., Zone Cmdr.'s, new district Cmdr.'s to attend these workshops. There is just too much information being given that needs to come back to Montana. This is very important in our need to mentor our future leaders. Our past Dept Cmdr.'s and district Cmdr.'s can help with and should help with mentoring ALL our members. We never know who our next leaders might be so it is important to work with all our members. How to fund sending all these members to Indy? For starters the national gives \$2000.00 to the department in each of five categories with the best retention over 90%. 2nd instead of relying on trying to get people to buy or sell raffle tickets, work on making all the membership target dates and making 100% of the national's goal to earn more money rewards. It is important NOW to help all our post understand and use a computer for their legion business, BECAUSE That's the only way it will be done. It is also important that ALL our department adjutant's office personnel attend the workshops, when I say all with what the national is working on in the near future we will need at least one more member in that office. That means finding room for everyone. ITS ALL-COMING FOLKS. I attended the national convention in New Orleans. In September our district meeting was hosted by post #117 but was held at the Laurel post newly renovated building.

## **DEPARTMENT COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

### **AMERICANISM**

#### **Lowell Long**

See Past Department Commander Report

### **BASEBALL**

#### **Ron Edwards**

Our 2024 season has to be one of the most exciting seasons we have had in recent history. The AA Region 7 tournament was back in Billings, and the Billings Scarlets went on to win it and then play in the Legion World Series in Shelby, North Carolina. Every 6 years our season gets pushed back a week in August with the American Legion World Series Championship Tuesday falling on the third Tuesday in August each year. This year that was August 21<sup>st</sup> which allowed us to push our post season tournaments into August.

## 2024 MONTANA/ALBERTA TEAMS

Montana team registration decreased one team, (Anaconda) from 68 teams in 2023 to 67 in 2024. This season we had: Class AA (9 teams), A (31 teams), B (26 teams) and C (1 team) to 67 teams in 2024: class AA (9 teams), A (31 teams), B (26 teams) and C (1 team). New teams in 2024 were the Lone Peak (Big Sky) Post 99 Junior and Senior teams.

### 2024 MONTANA/ALBERTA AMERICAN LEGION TEAMS

#### CLASS AA

Billings Royals  
Billings Scarlets  
Bozeman Bucks  
Great Falls Chargers  
Helena Senators  
Kalispell Lakers  
Lethbridge Elks  
Medicine Hat Moose Monarchs  
Missoula Mavericks

#### CLASS A

Anaconda A's  
Belgrade Bandits  
Billings Blue Jays  
Billings Cardinals  
Bitterroot Bucs  
Bitterroot Red Sox  
Bozeman Bucks A  
Butte Miners A  
Cranbrook Bandits  
Dillon Cubs  
Fort MacLeod Royals (SR)  
Gallatin Valley Outlaws  
Glacier Twins A  
Glasgow Reds

#### CLASS A

Glendive Blue Devils  
Great Falls Chargers A  
Havre Northstars  
Helena Reps  
Kalispell Lakers A  
Laurel Dodgers  
Lethbridge Miners  
Lewistown Redbirds  
Libby Loggers  
Lockwood Razerbacks  
Medicine Hat Knights  
Miles City Mavericks  
Mission Valley Mariners A  
Missoula Mavericks A  
Richland County Patriots  
Tri-County Cardinals  
Vauxhall Spurs

#### CLASS B

Billings Post 4 Blue (JR)  
Billings Post 4 Red (JR)  
Bitterroot Red Sox Post 47 B (JR)  
Bozeman Bucks B (JR)  
Butte Post 1 Muckers (JR)  
Cranbrook Bandits B Post 24 (JR)

#### CLASS B

Dillon Post 20 Cubs B (JR)  
Eureka Post 74 Kootenai Valley Rangers (SR)  
Gallatin Valley Posse (JR)  
Glasgow Reds B (JR)  
Glendive Blue Devils B (JR)  
Great Falls Post 341 Chargers B (JR)  
Havre Northstars B (JR)  
Helena Post 2 Independents (JR)  
Kalispell Lakers Gold (JR)  
Kalispell Lakers Red (JR)  
Lewistown Redbirds "B" (JR)  
Libby Loggers B (JR)  
Livingston Braves B Legion post 23 (SR)  
Lone Peak Baseball Post 99 (JR)  
Lone Peak Post #99 (SR)  
Miles City Colts (JR)  
Missoula Post 27 Mavericks B (JR)  
Mission Valley Mariners B (JR)  
Ronan South Valley Screwballs (JR)  
Vauxhall Jr Spurs (JR)

#### CLASS B/C

Bozeman Bucks C

## 2024 DISTRICT AND STATE TOURNAMENT RESULTS

| Tournament       | Host                    | Champion                                   | Runner-up                     |
|------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| North A District | Lethbridge Miners       | Vauxhall Spurs [ 5 ]                       | Lethbridge Miners [ 4 ]       |
| South A District | Belgrade Bandits        | Belgrade Bandits [ 9 ]                     | Gallatin Valley Outlaws [ 3 ] |
| East A District  | Glendive Bluedevils     | Billings Cardinals [ 10 ]                  | Miles City Mavericks [ 3 ]    |
| West A District  | Bitterroot Bucs         | Glacier Twins [ 4 ]                        | Kalispell Lakers A [ 1 ]      |
| State A**        | Mission Valley Mariners | Gallatin Valley Outlaws & Glacier Twins ** |                               |
| State AA         | Helena Senators         | Missoula Mavericks AA [ 6 ]                | Helena Senators [ 1 ]         |

\*\* State A Game 15 was rained out after the 3rd inning. The Glacier Twins were leading 5-1 but the game could not be resumed or suspended to play at least 5 innings. Results in Co-Champions for the 2024 season.

## 2024 CLASS A STATE TOURNAMENT

The Class A State Tournament was hosted by the Mission Valley Mariners in Polson. The **GLACIER TWINS** and **GALLATIN VALLEY OUTLAWS** played 3 innings of the championship game 15 when the skies opened, and the rain came down hard. The game could not be resumed or suspended to the next day so both teams are co-champions this season. Both teams went on to represent Montana at the Northwest Class A Regional Tournament (NWCART) which was hosted by Roseburg, Oregon. Gallatin Valley beat Glacier in game 12



### 2024 CLASS A CO-CHAMPION GALLATIN VALLEY

9-1 to advance to the championship game. They lost to Eagle River Alaska 5-0 finishing as the runner-up.

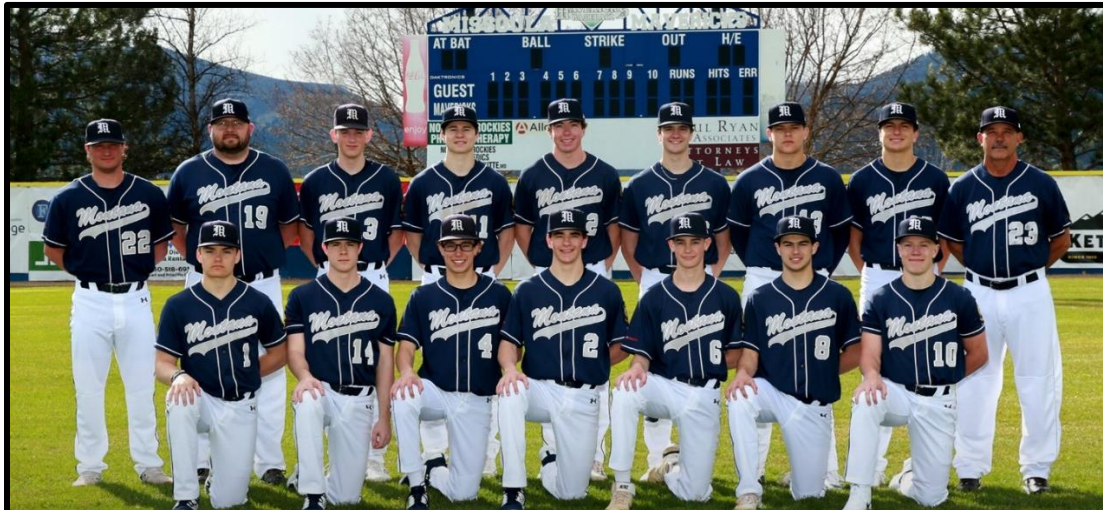
## 2024 CLASS AA STATE TOURNAMENT

The Class AA Tournament was hosted by the Helena Senators at Kindrick Legion Field in Helena. On August 4<sup>th</sup> the **MISSOULA MAVERICKS** would need to win two games against the undefeated host Helena Senators team. The Mavs beat the Senators 4-0 in game 14 and then won game 15 6-1 for their 13<sup>th</sup> State AA title and first one since 2017. Missoula went



### 2024 CLASS A CO-CHAMPION GLACIER TWINS

on to play in the AA Region 7 tournament in Billings. The Billings Scarlets also advanced as the regional tournament team as the Region 7 host.



**2024 CLASS AA CHAMPION MISSOULA MAVERICKS**

#### 2024 CLASS AA REGIONAL TOURNAMENT

The Missoula Mavericks lost to Bellevue (Wash.) 3-0 in game 3 on day 1, and then lost to Cheyenne (Wyo.) 8-2 in game 5 on day 2 to be eliminated from the tournament. The Billings



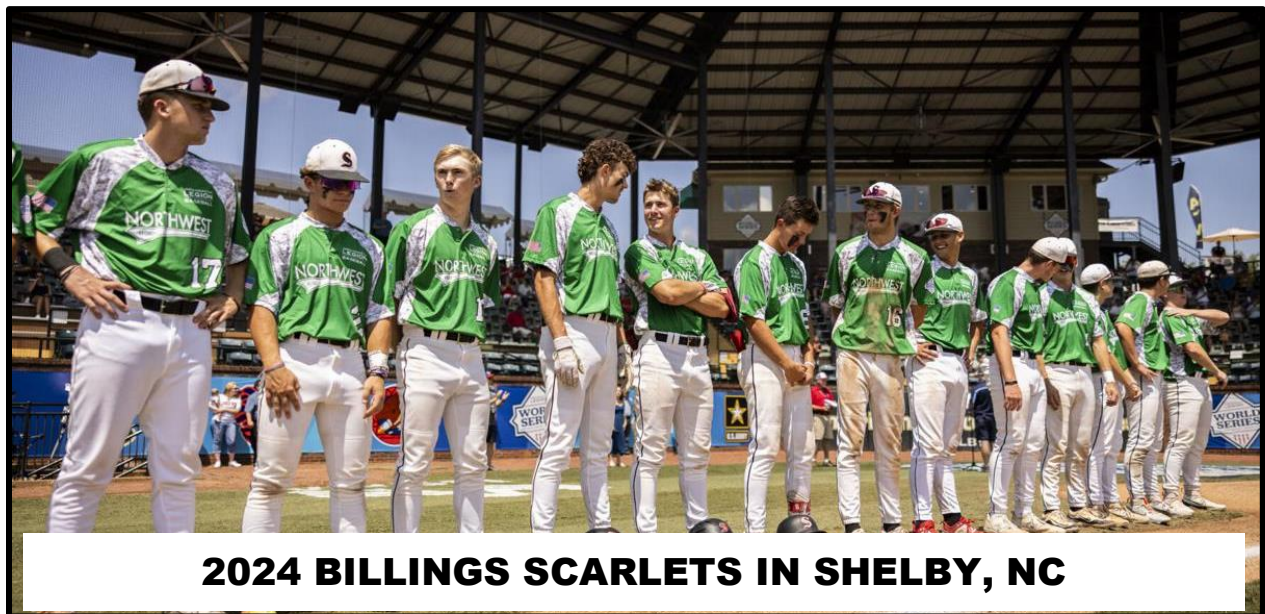
Scarlets which made the regional field as a host team after losing in the State AA tournament in Helena, lost 1-0 in its regional opener to Fort Collins (Colo.) before winning five straight games to take the Northwest Region 7 title. Four of those victories were by comfortable margins, including the 7-0 win in the regional final over Eugene (Ore.). Earlier on Sunday, the last day of the tournament, the Scarlets edged Eugene 5-4 in nine innings to get to the championship game.

## **2024 AMERICAN LEGION WORLD SERIES TOURNAMENT**

The Billings Scarlets win at the regional tournament that they hosted at Dehler Park ended a 62-year drought for a Montana/Alberta team qualifying for the American Legion World Series. The Billings Royals qualified and played in 4 Legion World Series. In 1958 the Billings Royals made their first World Series appearance in Colorado Springs. In 1960 the Royals were runners-up in the World Series behind the future Major League pitcher Dave McNally. The Royals went back to World Series in 1961, and in 1962 the Royals went again but were eliminated by St. Louis and New Orleans.

In Game 4 on day 1 Wilmington, Delaware beat the Scarlets 6 to 1. On Day 3 in Game 9 Bossier City, Louisiana defeated Billings 1 to 0, and on Day 4 in Game 10 Midland, Michigan won 4 to 3. Michigan went on to play and lose to Troy, Alabama in the Championship game. Their two 1-run losses proved to everyone that they deserved to be there.

Carl Hennell, our AA Chairman and I both attended the World Series in Shelby and had the opportunity to watch our Billings Scarlets team play. Montana has come close to qualifying for the past 5 seasons. What a treat to have finally made it! I attended the annual Baseball Chairman's conference held in Shelby for the first time in our history.

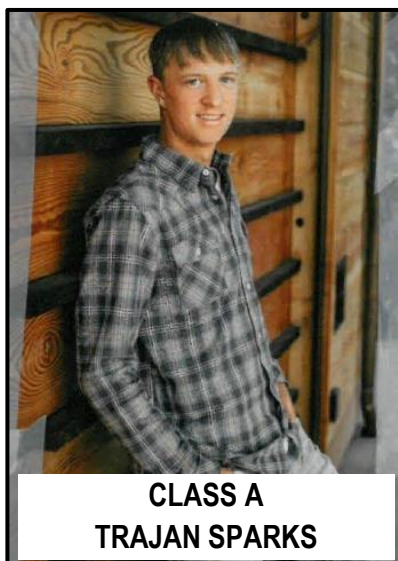


**2024 BILLINGS SCARLETS IN SHELBY, NC**



## 2024 SCHOLARSHIP AND COACH OF THE YEAR WINNERS

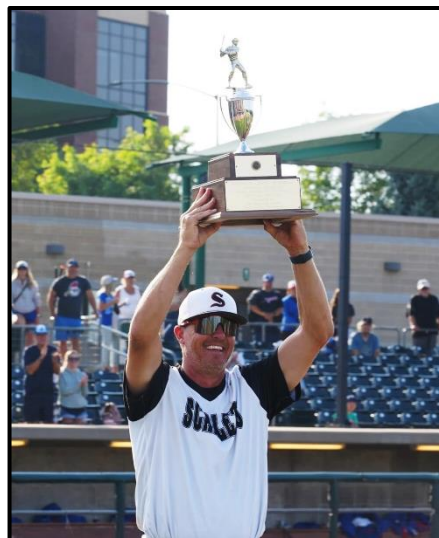
Congrats to our Class A our scholarship winner is **Trajan Sparks** from the **Lewistown Redbirds**. He is also the son of the longtime coach of the redbirds, Scott Sparks. The AA scholarship winner is **Sam Ark** from the **Helena Senators**.



And to our coaches of the year, **Drew Dumont** from the Class A **Mission Valley Mariners**; and our AA coach of the year **Adam Hust** from the **Billings Scarlets**.



**CLASS A**  
**DREW DUMONT**



**CLASS AA**  
**ADAM HUST**

Thanks to Carl Hennell our AA Chairman and District Chairmen Jeff Brabant (East), Todd Knouse (North), Jeremy Olson (South) and Bryan Larson (West). I also want to thank **Commander Lowell Long** again for his ongoing support for our American Legion Baseball program.

Thank you all as we look forward to another successful season in 2025 and another trip to the American Legion World Series.

For more baseball news and information please visit [www.montanalegionbaseball.org](http://www.montanalegionbaseball.org).

## **SCOUTS BSA**

### **Conrad Heimbigner**

I have participated in Wood Badge Staff Development starting in April 21-22, 2023, for Wood Badge Adult course 4-315-24 on August 8-11 Session 1 and September 6-8, 2024. This course ends when the participants complete 5 separate goals within the following 18 months to enhance themselves or the Unit, District, or Council of the Boy Scouts of America to provide a better program for the youth in Montana and the visiting Councils. Wood Badge Course 4-315-24 was conducted at the K-M Scout Ranch, 1066 K-M Rd, Hilger, MT 59451. It is a Boy Scouts of America National Program to instruct Adults how to become better leaders and lead by example through learning communication skills, the DISC Behavior Style Training, the EDGE method, the five stages of team development, the TOOLS of leadership, and many other skills in a setting as they enter the Course as an acting Cub Scout youth new to Scouting.

, cross over from Cub Scouts into Scouts BSA, and earn rank to complete the “in person” training portion to return back to their homes and local units, or positions in their Districts or Council to complete five separate personal goals to complete a “Ticket” which is very similar to completing an Eagle Scout Project so each participant experiences what youth experience going through Scouting as a youth from Kindergarten through Senior in High School in a very action packed 5 day course either in a 5 day continuous course or a three day / two day split course like this one. There is benefits for having a split course in which the participants have to return home and keep communication with in their Patrols (groups similar to committees or Platoon – squads in the Army) throughout the break and return with a planned campout including meals and methods to prepare and cleanup after each meal for the remainder of the course as we expect youth to be able to do as they rank up through the Scouts BSA program learning all the requirements of Adult Leadership as well to be able to return back to their respective units and align them to be presenting the guidelines of National Boy Scouts of America for that age group program as a “Well Trained Leader”. These five individual goals are monitored and reviewed by the Staff for the next 18 months following. If any participant does not complete their assigned individual chosen goals they do not “graduate” and receive their award of two beads on a leather cord and have to retake the course at a later date, if possible, in the future. The youth program that is similar to Wood Badge for the Adults is called “NYLT” - National Youth Leadership Training which is also conducted and presented to youth 14 to 20 years of age at K-M Scout Ranch. Any youth that completes NYLT is eligible to attend “NAYLE “- National Advanced Youth Leadership Experience at the National Campsite – Philmont Scout Ranch, 17 Deer Run Rd, Cimarron, NM 87714 or Summit Bethel Reserve, 2550 Jack Furst Dr, Glen Jean, WV 25846 These are the premiere youth leadership camps for the youth our Scouting Programs enhance or recognize for the Eagle Scout of the Year Award winner most likely will have attended NYLT if not NAYLE on their journey to earning the Eagle Scout Rank. I have also attended the 2024 Fall Fellowship Order of the Arrow event at the K-M Scout Ranch on September 27, 28, and 29th. I communicated with various leaders at this event about the American Legion Boy Scout programs and how to promote them will attending courses on how to promote and enhance the Order of the Arrow program in the Montana Council. The Order of the Arrow is the “Honor Society of the Boys Scouts of America” that provides “cheerful service” to their communities through the Units they are members of. I am communicating with Boy Scouts of America – Montana Council Staff and Executives to promote our Scouting programs in every eligible Unit in the Montana Council to continue the work of Bill Rich and the passing of Resolution No. 21: Scouts BSA. There is not an available Council Data Base to promote the eligible youth for the Eagle Scout of the Year Award individually at each unit. We are working on a method that is a continual education of the Awards and programs that American Legion provides to every Scouting youth and Volunteer Scouter such as the American Legion Square Knot Award at each unit continuously into the future. Covid has caused disruptions in the Montana Council Scouting programs and those disruptions have been seen in the application number decreases for the American Legion Eagle Scout of the Year Award in our Department. As Units (Troops and Packs as well as Venturing Crews) regain the outdoor events and practices of pre-covid numbers, we are projected to start having increasing numbers of applications and youth eligible for our programs; however, the youth leaders who knew about our programs, that were the Patrol Leaders and Senior Patrol Leaders in the Scouts BSA program and equivalent leadership positions in the Venturing Crew program, have mostly aged out of the system to promote the American Legion Program as in the past. We as a team of leaders will be working with Unit leaders who may have also left the program

as their sons and/or daughters aged out of the Boy Scouts of America programs. The Montana Council of the Boy Scouts of America has an excellent staff and board that is dedicated to serving the Youth of Montana and the units of visiting Councils to the Montana Council Scout Camps. Hopefully the work we are doing today will show increasing numbers participating in our American Legion Programs starting in November and December as units go through the “Rechartering” Process with our American Legion Chartering Posts. For those legion members in Chartering Posts that are not aware of the American Eagle Scout of the Year Award or the American Legion Scouting Award this is the link to the requirements: [https://scoutingwire.org/files/pdf/522-174\\_WB.pdf](https://scoutingwire.org/files/pdf/522-174_WB.pdf)

## **AMERICAN LEGION BOYS STATE**

### **Duane Cunningham**

#### **Program Schedule**

The American Legion Boys State (ALBS) and American Legion Auxiliary Girls State (ALAGS) program is scheduled to take place from June 8-14, 2025, at Carroll College.

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Alumni Banquet – February 4, 2024

#### **Objectives:**

- Secure sales for 38 tables to businesses or individuals. Tables are priced at \$650 each, which includes four seats, four legislators, and dinner for eight (London Broil). A list of 62 potential buyers has been refined by Lowell and Kathy.
- Obtain auction items with a higher-end, patriotic theme.

#### **Deadlines:**

- All table sales and auction items must be finalized by January 15, 2025.

#### **Action Plan:**

1. Draft and distribute letters for table sponsorships, donation requests, and speaker invitations (targeting ALBS and ALAGS graduates, with emphasis on including alumni from the girls' program).
2. Assign tasks for securing table sales and auction items.

#### **Responsibilities:**

- Table Sales: To be assigned.
  - Auction Items: To be assigned.
- 

Program Preparations for ALBS/ALAGS

#### Event Dates:

June 8-14, 2025, at Carroll College.

#### Coordination with State Office of Public Instruction (OPI):

An information packet regarding the program and enrollment will be sent out to schools by the end of October 2024. This initiative aims to enhance program visibility and school access.

#### Recruitment Schedule:

- School visits will begin following the Christmas break. It is advised that materials be finalized and recruitment efforts commence in November.
- October to December is considered a prime time for fundraising activities. All committee members are encouraged to participate.

#### Available Resources:

A donation letter is prepared for use as a conversation starter during fundraising efforts.

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#### Director Updates

##### Curriculum Development:

The curriculum is currently being developed from scratch due to the absence of previous materials. Efforts are underway to obtain foundational resources from the Kansas Boys State program or other states.

##### Instructor Recruitment:

No substantial progress has been made in recruiting instructors, though a few inquiries have been received. All instructors will be required to undergo background checks. Clarification is needed on the background check process and timelines.

##### Guest Speaker Recruitment:

The guest speaker list will be finalized after the upcoming election, with a focus on nonpartisan representation. While most speakers are expected to be politicians, there is a preference for increased female representation. Input from the Auxiliary Committee on potential speakers is welcome.

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#### Reminders and Guidelines

- **Nonpartisan Stance:** The ALBS/ALAGS program is nonpartisan, focusing on civics, citizenship, and government education. Participants and organizers are reminded to refrain from political discussions and ensure a neutral stance.
- **Communication Protocol:** Only the National Commander, National President, State Commander, and State President may officially speak on behalf of the American Legion and Auxiliary. Committee members should exercise caution with their public statements and social media activity.

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## Additional Updates

### ALAGS Conference Report:

Kathy provided an update on the ALAGS conference at the national level, highlighting fundraising as a key priority. Recommended potential donors include:

- Lions Club
- Kiwanis
- Banks
- Law Offices
- Funeral Homes
- Police & Fire Department Associations

### Policies Under Review:

- Bullying and Dress Code Policies: Updates will be sought from the national organization. These policies must be signed by applicants and parents before admission.
- Refund Policy: There is a proposal to restrict refunds to emergency cancellations only, treating other application fees as donations. This will be reviewed for alignment with current practices and acceptance by local Posts and Units.

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## Next Steps

1. Finalize the information packet and begin school outreach by November.
2. Proceed with banquet preparations and finalize auction items by January 15, 2025.
3. Continue efforts in curriculum development and instructor recruitment.
4. Update policies as needed and communicate changes to stakeholders.

The committee will continue to work toward these objectives, ensuring a successful program and alumni banquet.

## **CHILDREN & YOUTH**

### **Jed Damson**

We are working on getting applicants to apply for our scholarship. This may take a book and review the requirements for the application. We had a zoom meeting on this, and we will be making some changes at our next meeting. We have had no TFA applications so far between Convention and Fall Conference. Hoping more Legionnaires would look at this item.

## **CONSTITUTION & INTERNAL AFFAIRS**

### **Richard Klose**

A zoom meeting was held on October 14, 2024 at 7pm.

Present were, Dept Cmdr. Ken Simon, Dept Adjutant Duane Cunningham, Dept Judge Advocate Tim Fox, committee members Roger Hancock, Bill Cummins, Dan Smart, and chairman Richard Klose.

Judge Advocate Fox had two issues, 1, he stated that with some of the voting confusion at past Dept Conventions that (A) maybe a deadline for candidates to declare for office and secret ballots with names on them might help. Roger said that we would have to keep in mind that we might have to deal with someone dropping out or passing away before the election. Richard stated that because post delegates to the Dept convention are instructed as to they are to vote for from the list of declared candidates and someone declaring at the convention would not technically support. Cmdr. Simon thought that candidates should declare at fall conference. Dept adjutant thought at least by the spring meetings.

The 18 articles of the constitution were broken down for review. Dan to take articles 1-5, Roger 6-10, Richard 11-15, Bill 16-18.

By-Laws break down, Roger 1-6, Bill 7-12

The committee is to look at C&BL'S from other departments to see what ideas we may put in our C&BL'S. The department of Florida is said to have a good one to look at.

We have three more zoom meetings scheduled, November 21, December 19, and January 16.

## **CONVENTION 2025/2026**

### **Duane Cunningham**

The Department Conventions for 2025 and 2026 will be held in Helena, Montana, due to planning and preparation challenges experienced by the host posts in other potential locations. After considering various factors, Helena emerged as the optimal choice to accommodate the conventions, ensuring a smooth and successful event for all attendees. The Civic Center will host the Department's activities, while the American Legion Auxiliary (ALA) will hold its sessions at the DoubleTree Downtown.

### **2025 Convention Adjustments**

For the 2025 Department Convention, there will be slight modifications to the schedule, specifically concerning the banquet. These changes are due to the availability constraints of the venue, but all other events and activities will follow the traditional format that attendees have come to expect. The Department has taken careful measures to ensure that these adjustments do not significantly impact the convention experience.

## **2026 Convention Planning**

Planning for the 2026 convention is already underway, with the aim of avoiding any scheduling conflicts and ensuring all arrangements are made well in advance. Using Helena as the host city for consecutive years allows for better continuity and smoother preparation, drawing on lessons learned from the 2025 session.

## **Community Engagement and Growth**

As always, the Legion Family is excited to engage with the local community, promote our mission, and work together toward the growth of the organization. Holding the conventions in Helena presents an excellent opportunity to strengthen our presence, connect with new members, and enjoy the camaraderie that comes with being part of the American Legion Family.

We look forward to welcoming all attendees to Helena for these upcoming conventions and are committed to providing a memorable and enjoyable experience for everyone involved.

## **CONVENTION 2027**

### **Bob Brewer**

The 2027 Department Convention will take place in Havre, Montana, marking an exciting new chapter as we bring the event to this vibrant community. The planning team is enthusiastic about collaborating closely with the Department to ensure that the 2027 convention will be one of the best yet, offering a seamless blend of traditional activities and fresh experiences for attendees.

Havre offers a unique setting that embodies the spirit of the American Legion, with a strong local community eager to welcome members from across the state. The planning committee is already working hard to arrange a program that maintains the high standards of previous conventions while also incorporating elements that highlight the character and hospitality of Havre.

The 2027 convention planning team is committed to making the event a memorable and impactful experience for all participants. Through early preparation and close coordination with the Department, the goal is to deliver a well-organized event that honors tradition while introducing innovative ideas to enhance the convention. Every effort will be made to accommodate a diverse range of activities, ensuring there is something for everyone to enjoy.

Hosting the convention in Havre presents a fantastic opportunity to grow the American Legion Family's presence in the area and engage with the local community. The convention will focus on promoting our mission and creating lasting connections while providing members with the chance to come together in celebration of our shared values and goals.

We look forward to seeing everyone in Havre in 2027 and are dedicated to making it an exceptional convention experience that brings our Legion Family closer together.

## **DEPARTMENT EMERGENCY RESPONSE COORDINATOR**

### **Robert Miller**

At the Department Convention in Glasgow this summer the incoming Department Commander asked if I would take the job on, I let him know I would give it a go. AS I have had some experience in this area as a Director of Public Works. My first priority was to see if there was a SOP for this position and we could not find one so I started to put one together so the next DERC would have one to make the job go better. One of the goals is to put a section in the SOP with all post's information in it so if an emergency does arise in that posts area we have the contact information. I will be sending each District commander a packet of questioners or each post.

## **DISTINGUISHED GUESTS**

### **Larry Dobb**

I am delighted to share our enthusiasm for the upcoming Fall Conference, where we will have the honor of hosting the National Commander. This is a significant occasion for us, and we are eager to make it a memorable and impactful experience.

I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to our Department Headquarters for their hard work in organizing such an outstanding schedule. Your dedication and efforts to accommodate the needs and requests of National have been crucial in making this event a success, and we are truly grateful for your commitment.

This conference will feature some exciting "firsts" for us, and we look forward to being a part of these new initiatives. We are confident that these efforts will not only enhance our programs but also strengthen our work throughout the state.

We can't wait to welcome the National Commander and all attendees as we come together for what promises to be a fantastic event. Let's make this conference a remarkable milestone for our organization and continue to grow our impact.

## **FINANCE CHAIRMAN**

### **Bill Cummins**

As the new chairman of the finance committee this has been a learning process. Since the convention in June the finance committee has met several times over Zoom and prepared a budget to be presented to the executive for their approval. On July 25th we held our first Zoom meeting where we went over the budget with the Department line by line and discussed whether to raise or lower or omit some lines in the budget.

The committee was informed at this meeting about the Department's financial situation with us having more money in our investments than is allowed by federal law. According to our auditor we should only have one and a half times our annual budget in reserve and Investments. If we continue this process the auditor felt that the IRS could come in and call for an audit and we will probably be penalized for not complying with the federal law.

We did have a deficit budget last year and a budget that will be finalized this year will probably have a deficit, but this would probably be the last year that we would have a deficit budget and that is why we have to look really hard at future fundraising and need to keep a good handle on our investments and savings. During that meeting, which was mostly educational for the finance committee, we also talked about ways to make our fundraising work better. Other than just raffles we were asked to come up with ideas on fundraising projects. It was brought to the attention of the committee that the Big K raffle is not producing the funds that it was set up to do. It's hard to understand why the post and the legion family have not been participating as much as in the past. This could be a good fundraiser if the post and the rest of the Legion family participated.

The cash calendar seems to be the best money raising endeavor as far as Raffles at this time and should be continued. The adjutant's assistant talked about the new online QuickBooks that they were converting to and that this was a work in progress. During our Zoom meeting on September 5th, a discussion was held about raising the scholarship or prize for the oratorical contest with the feeling that we could get more participation with a larger financial prize; this has been suggested by the finance committee at our June convention in 2023. A motion was made and passed to increase the prize money or cash reward to \$5,000 for first place, \$1,500 for second and \$500 for 3rd and 4th. This will have to be presented as a Resolution at the Executive Committee meeting in October. The other change that was also in the motion was to award prizes at the end of the contest instead of doing it as a scholarship and having to hold the money for up to two or three years and then the winner either forgetting about the award or feeling that there wasn't enough financial incentive to even ask for the award. It was felt it was better to award the prize at the end of the contest.

There was also a lot of discussion about the budget, and we did go over several of the line items in the budget. The committee came up with a pretty much finalized budget at that time except there were a couple unknowns in the budget since the travel had not been finalized for the upcoming June convention in 2025 because of the change in moving the convention from Calgary back to Helena, which will be a good financial savings for the Department.

A discussion was held on fundraising, and it was brought to the committee's attention that there was a possibility of partnering with Big Sky Brewery in Missoula and having them produce a beer can with one of their beers for the legion that would have a legion emblem on the can along with recognition of the Legion, Auxiliary, Sons of American Legion and Legion Riders. Duane and Lonnie, we're going to explore this possibility of partnering with the brewery where we would get a portion of proceeds of the sales of this beer. It was felt that this could be a long-term money raising endeavor for the legion; There was also talk about partnering with Willie's Distillery to produce a whiskey with a legion emblem on the bottle. A motion was made to have Duane and Lonnie pursue this to see if it would be a worthwhile project for the legion Department with The Distillery and the brewery in Missoula.

The feeling is that it is difficult at this time to continue doing raffles for the reason that most posts are also doing Raffles as money raisers for their posts and organizations within their communities are also doing raffles and that people are burned out by having to buy raffles and there are so many that they can't contribute to them all. Although we do have two Raffles going on at this time, which are a pair of cornhole boards to be raffled off at the fall executive meeting and the department was given a fishing kayak to be raffled off at next year's

convention in Helena. This is a well-equipped kayak set up for fishing not just a kayak to paddle around the lake. We also talked about having one pint beer glasses made for the legion department and selling these to Legion members or the post that have a bar connected with their post. It was also discussed to get small glasses made for drinks such as the whiskey from The Distillery.

By the end of this Zoom meeting most of the members of the committee were feeling comfortable with the budget and felt that it was a lot easier to understand the way it was presented and would be easier for the executive committee to look at and pass the budget in October. In our Zoom meeting on October 2nd, we did finalize the budget and went over some of the line items again trying to trim some money from some of the expenditures and look at fundraising. Before our meeting went to the budget and fundraising, there was a presentation by Stockman Wealth Management, who is our financial advisor, on how our investments work and how they are doing. Dave was very pleased with our investments on the portfolio that we have. It seems to be producing at a rate around 12%, which is good for the way our economy is at this time.

The budget was approved by the finance committee at this meeting, and it does show a \$33,000 deficit for this fiscal year. The operational part of the budget was approved in the June meeting so the department could go ahead and do business such as making payroll, paying bills that may come in during the early part of this year. The National Department had been very slow about distributing the money to the Departments for the memberships that they received, and our department had to withdraw \$50,000 from our investments to be able to operate until we get reimbursed by the National for our memberships that are sent in. At this time, we're starting to catch up and I was informed that we had received payments from National up to the first of September. During the meeting a motion was made and passed to go ahead and partner with Big Sky Brewing. The beer can be sold to members as well as being distributed through a beer distributor so that the posts and other establishments could have this product for sale. They are also producing a beer spicket handle for the bars so that they could have our beer on draft. This could be a good long-term financial endeavor.

There was also a motion made and passed to go ahead with the whiskey glasses and beer mugs or glasses. It was also felt that these glasses could be etched instead of having a plastic Insignia on the side. It is also the Department's concern as well as myself that the department is spending more money on travel to and from conventions and executive meetings and other programs than we are on Awards and scholarships. We are supposed to be an organization that promotes patriotism and Americanism, and this is where our priorities should lie.

## **HIGHWAY FATALITY MARKER**

### **Michael Emett**

Summer only got worse; I spent June and July on the road with four more funerals along with moving my mother-in-law's property. Nonetheless, work got done by the intrepid crews that work at the various posts throughout the state.

I continue to reach out to my Posts on bi-weekly basis. This keeps them informed and me on my toes. Currently, I communicate with 59 posts. That's an improvement of 5 Posts from last year. I have zero, no, nada, contact with anyone out of District 3. They have a number of reportable fatalities that need to be addressed. I do contact other posts to attempt at

increasing awareness of the program. I need them to contact me so that we can coordinate our efforts more thoroughly. Then of eleven districts have at least one Post operational, most have multiple Posts doing the job.

It is a pleasure to report that Posts share resources when necessary. I have been able to have crosses manufactured for me and I have been able to reach out to those posts that are in need. District 7 has helped me, and I am certain that they help others with obtaining delineator posts.

I am also fortunate to receive feedback from posts with questions, suggestions, problems, etc. I feel this is important when trying to maintain a successful operation. I have tried to contact all parties that have reached out to the Adjutant's Office for help. I have had very little negative feedback when attempting to solve particular problems for people.

To the best of my knowledge, we have not placed any new media this past six months. NOTE: A new photo book, **MONTANA ROAD WRECK**, by Chris M. Forsyth, was published this year. It is a compilation of Fatality Markers throughout the state (certainly not all) with minimal commentary to accompany the photos. I urge the American Legion to purchase a copy for their records.

There is the issue of the 800-pound gorilla in the room that needs addressed. Posts are unclear as to what constitutes appropriate decorations on crosses/posts. Personally, I take anything on a marker off and leave it beside or in front of the Fatality Marker. I noticed while travelling through a couple of reservations that the FMs are so enshrined with stuff that the post is not visible. Sometimes, it is just a personal thing, like a child who perished, and the family wants to make this something other than the intended purpose. I really thing this needs to be addressed in our instructions (with approval by MDT). The wording is somewhat vague, and we need to address this.

I had 19 of 59 Posts report as of today. 19 new FMs were erected by these 19 posts. Maintenance (weeds, painting, straightening, replacements, etc.) done on hundreds of markers throughout the state.

## **INSURANCE DIRECTOR**

### **Duane Cunningham**

I often get asked what Legion Insurance (LIT) is or worse yet, I run into Legionnaires and Legion members who have never even heard of Legion Insurance. So, I thought it might be a good time to provide a little information on what it is, eligibility, and why its important. First off ALL Legion Family members can sign up for Legion Insurance. If you aren't incorporating LIT in your pitch as to why you should join the American Legion, the American Legion Auxiliary and the Sons of the American Legion, then you are leaving out a huge benefit.

The Legionnaire Insurance Trust (LIT) was formed in 1966 with two primary goals: to provide Legion families with low-cost insurance protection, and to provide a source of revenue to participating Legion Departments. The Trust has been so successful for over 50 years that today over 2,000,000 Legionnaires in 48 participating Departments are enrolled in this unique program. Also, in the same period of time, hundreds of millions of dollars in

claim benefits have been paid to Legionnaires and their families through the LIT; and over \$52 million in allocations have been paid to participating Legion Departments.

The first Trust insurance plan to be offered was the Hospital Income Protection plan, a program designed to pay fixed dollar amounts for periods of hospital confinement. Over the years, other insurance coverage offered included: Cancer, Accidental Death, Travel Accident, Critical Illness, Disability Income, Emergency Assistance, Long-Term Care, Medicare Supplement, Discount Cards, Dental, Whole Life, Auto, Homeowners, Identity Theft, and Home Health Care.

Since its creation, AGIA has worked closely with the Trust to develop insurance programs especially designed for Department members and their families. LIT offers a free No Cost to you Accidental Death Insurance plan. Your beneficiary will receive a check for \$5,000.00 if you suffer a fatal covered accident while you are traveling to or from or participating in any covered event conducted for Legion business, or \$1,000.00 for all other fatal covered accidents. You pay nothing for this coverage.

The American Legion endorses this coverage to stand by your family with up to \$1,000.00 cash benefits paid straight to your beneficiary, if you suffer a fatal covered accident at home, on the job, in your car, on vacation, while traveling, wherever you are. The LIT also offers Emergency Assistance Plans, a Cancer Care Insurance Plan, a Long-Term Care Plan, Health and Dental Insurance, Medicare Supplement and Medicare Advantage Plans and even Identity Theft monitoring. Pretty much a one stop insurance plan specifically designed for Legionnaires.

Please see the Department Adjutant for additional information and to register.

## **LEGISLATIVE**

### **Roger Hagan**

I want to begin this report by recognizing our departed good friend, Comrade Bill White. Bill and I were intricately involved in the Montana Department legislative efforts at the state level. Bill also accompanied our team during our several Congressional visits in D.C. For the past several years Bill served as your American Legion Liaison to the Governor. He was instrumental in getting our message concerning state initiatives to the Governor and assisted me throughout the many legislative sessions, getting the word out. I will miss my friend immensely and ask all of you to take a moment to reflect on his dedication to our veterans and our organization.

Your Legislative Committee has continued to represent the Department in a variety of venues since the June Convention. During that time, we have coordinated on the Veterans Long Term Care and Veteran Cemetery Study and met with the State Administration and Veterans Affairs Interim Committee (SAVA). Sadly, I was unable to attend the National American Legion Convention in New Orleans but I hear that it was a great success.

The Veterans Long Term Care and Veteran Cemetery Study is completed. The survey outreach by our and other veteran organizations assisted in gathering 3,579 surveys, of which 238 were hard copy. While that only reached about 4% of our veterans, that is a great improvement over the 2006 survey respondent numbers. Thank you to all veterans who

completed the survey and who encouraged your veteran friends to do the same. The study was released in September. The 120-page study provides valuable insight into what services our veterans will need in the coming decade. By a law originally proposed by your American Legion, this study will now be done every 10 years following the U.S. Census. I hope to get hard copies of the study for each post but that may be a stretch. More to follow.

The SAVA Interim Committee meeting in July was attended by Bill White and me. We were pleased to have 3 veterans from Lewistown attend the meeting and express their concerns about the shortage of Veteran Service Officers (VSO's) across the state. They also stated that the predator groups charging our veterans for assistance in filing VA Claims were becoming more prevalent in Montana. Their concerns were heard by the committee and questions were asked concerning the number of additional VSO's and Administrative Assistants that would be adequate to properly serve our Montana veteran population. Bill and I were asked about this, and our reply was 3 more administrative assistants and 10 more VSO's, would be a good start.

This discussion was not lost on the committee, as the September SAVA meeting included a presentation by a group called "Veterans Guardian", invited by the committee. This group is a VA Claim Consulting entity that has dozens of Veterans as their clients across our state. While this group's fee structure is not as predatory as many of the others, there is still concern that our state Veteran Affairs Division is not adequately staffed to help our veterans at no charge

rather than 'paying someone' to do what the veteran deserves to have done for them. Bill White and I were at that September SAVA meeting, and we provided input to the committee reinforcing our support of additional VSOs for the Montana Veteran's Affairs Division.

This group is proposing a legislative bill titled the "Providing Lawful Utilization of Services for Veterans Act" (PLUS Act), which would legalize in Montana these predatory groups. We will be watching closely this proposed legislation and keeping you informed.

The next thing we will keep busy with during the upcoming legislative session is the fixes we need to make to the bill we got passed last year providing for a 50% income tax exemption for veteran retirement. First, we need to clarify the eligibility (the Department of Revenue interprets the law we passed requires a retiree to be a Montana resident before they retire), next we need to get rid of the 5-year limit on the exemption, and then we need to get rid of the 10-year sunset on the law. This may take more than one session to accomplish, however it took us 8 sessions (16 years) to get this far, so be patient. Once we have those fixes done, we will then turn our efforts to getting a 100% exemption and include all military retirees regardless of Montana Wage Source Income.

Another issue we anticipate will come back in the 2025 session is the "Defend the Guard Act", which we were actively involved in defeating in the 2023 session, not once (House Bill 527), but twice (Senate Bill 560). While the title of this bill seems positive for our National Guard, it is just the opposite. The bill, if passed into law, would preclude the Governor from allowing our National Guard to deploy to federal duty if the overseas deployment may involve combat operations. This limitation will spell the end of our National Guard as we know it. The Department of Defense would move most, if not all, of our missions, troops, and equipment

to a state that is accessible for all federal deployments. We are preparing to defend against this in 2025.

One thing I will repeat in this report, and will continue to harp on in the future, is the need for more members of the Montana Department to participate in our Congressional Outreach program. It is important that all of our members subscribe to the national program called VoterVoice. You can click on the link ([votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/home](http://votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/home)) and “Sign up for Alerts”. While we have improved some, Montana is still near the bottom of the list of states contacting their congressional members concerning our national issues. In a recent email from the national legislative team, Montana’s response to calls for congressional communications was 2.21% of our membership (membership compared to VoterVoice actions), which put us 13th worst in the nation.

Again, I ask you to become/remain engaged in the political process. This is election time! If you are registered as an absentee voter, you should have received your ballot in the mail, as they were mailed on October 11th. If haven’t voted absentee yet, please get your vote in by mail or vote in person on election day, Tuesday, November 5th! And get your veteran comrades to vote as well. Take them to the polls, help them get their absentee ballot to the elections

office, and above all, do your homework and know your candidates! Then, after the election, get to know who your state legislators and U.S. Senators and Representative are and contact them early and often. Let them know your (our) needs, interests, and preferences. Talk with them about military and veteran issues and find out where they stand on those issues. Then, let your Montana Department know of the results of your engagement. Grassroots is the lifeblood of legislative efforts, both on the state and national level.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

### **Kim Kay McCarty Martin**

On the 11th of October, at 7pm, the Membership Committee met via zoom. The following committee members were present: Department Vice-CDR Kim Kay c McCarty Martin, committee chair, Department CDR Ken Simon; South Central Zone CDR Robert Miller; Western Zone CDR Linda Cousineau; and District 11 CDR Richard Klose (on the National Committee for 21st Century Membership Strategic Plan).

The members of the committee read and discussed the draft of the American Legion of Montana Membership and Post Activities: 21st Century Strategic Plan. It is based on National’s 21st Century Plan and simplified for Montana. Montana’s first years’ goals are in line with Nationals goals. These goals, emphasize six areas. They are as follows: 1. Be The One, 2. Training and Education, 3. Communication, 4. Post Development and Revitalization, 5. Membership Recruiting and Retention, and 6. Community Engagement. It is recommended that the draft be adopted and utilized at the 2024 Fall Conference on 25-26 October 2024. It was also recommended that the Strategic Plan be reviewed and updated every year at the Fall Conferences to keep it viable. Richard Klose informed the committee what he learned at the Membership Workshop Conference in Indianapolis in July, that National has a challenge out to Departments that if they can reach 90% retention, they can get \$2,000 (based on size of membership).

It was discussed that Department send more members to the Membership Training as there are a lot of breakout sessions to learn from. Rob Miller was able to open the Drop Box of the training material that National offered of all the sessions (Kim Kay McCarty Martin and Erin Carpenter have not been able to access the Drop Box so Rob will present it to Erin in a flash drive). The material covered can be used for post and district training which is in line with the outline of the Strategic Plan. Another training tool is YouTube, since National has videos available there for training too. It was also discussed that Department invest in a Turewell h3 projector to be used for district training.

The committee discussed ways to increase membership and get enthusiasm in the posts. Both Zone CDR's Cousineau and Miller stated what their districts were doing and what the posts were doing to increase membership. Many posts have an event scheduled in the community especially for Veterans Day and Buddy Checks are being done. It was noted that District 5 CDR Alex Vogal has momentum going with his posts by being the first District to reach 65%, and being the recipient of the Dept. Vice-CDR's challenge of Chocolate. It was also noted that a lot of districts are close behind so we want to build on that energy to continue reaching out goals and reaching 90% retention. Zone CDR Miller said a lot of members in his area didn't get first dues notices and as the second dues notices are on the way his zone should be picking up on momentum.

It was discussed that all members of the Montana American Legion take the Basic Course that is offered online. This would give new members information on what The American Legion is and

what it does for its programs. It would reiterate to members the reason they joined in the first place and invigorate them. District 11 CDR Klose said everyone should be brave enough to ask people if they are veterans. The committee agrees, we need to be vigilant and ask as a way to increase our membership when we are at our community events or even when out and about doing our daily activities. Department CDR Simon brought up that we need to also be asking if they are eligible for The American Legion Auxiliary, or Sons of The American Legion as a way to increase our membership but also make it a family affair. Dept Vice-CDR McCarty Martin advised members that women don't identify as veterans such as wearing hats or clothing identifying themselves as veterans, so don't forget to ask if they are veterans too.

Digital and social media was discussed also. With most things going digital now, we need to be utilizing this platform more. By posts having a Facebook page, we can continuously reach out more to our members and potential members. Department and some posts already have a Facebook page that they use to either post pictures of what the posts are doing or get the word out of what is going on in their communities. Department is asking for photos that can be shared on Facebook showing what posts and districts are doing in their communities. National is putting commercials on Facebook and not on TV and Department is willing to put on a 10 to 20 sec video of Why I belong from local areas.

The Digital era is not going to go away, and if we want to stay connected with younger members this is the way to do it. Instagram and Facebook are ways to communicate but like Erin Carpenter pointed out, there is also text messaging, e-mail, and phone calls. Some posts keep in contact with their members by phone calls while the Department officers use e-mailing to communicate on a regular basis.

## NATIONAL SECURITY

Fred Ferrer

**Abstract:** We have entered a period of escalating threats to the nation—both foreign and domestic. Recently, former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates (who served under Presidents Bush and Obama) stated in the Washington Post that “...our Army is shrinking, our Navy is decommissioning warships faster than new ones can be built, our Air Force has stagnated in size, and only a fraction of the force is available for combat on any given day.”<sup>1</sup> The following report will highlight the threats I see we face today. We must be particularly attuned to threats as we approach this national election and, in the months immediately afterward. Not only might our global adversaries look to take advantage of any election turmoil, but the continuing agitation of the American public by media, politicians, and the failing economy are polarizing and radicalizing factors that will push more people to the Right and Left extremes and possibly into violent actions.

### Nation-State Threats

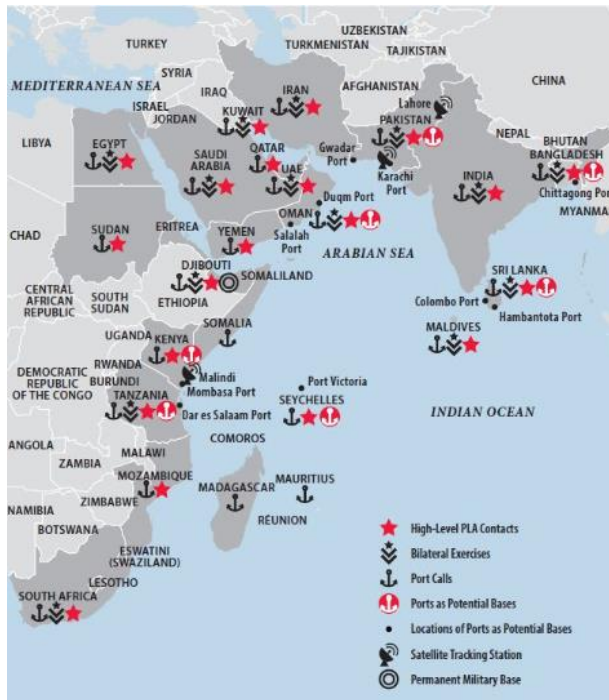
Iran has become the greatest threat to, not only our longtime ally Israel in the Middle East, but also as the chief antagonist in a growing conflict between Shia-connected surrogates and those of the nation’s Arab Sunni allies (I.e, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar). Recent open-source reporting is that Iran (which launched the largest ballistic attack on another nation-state (Israel) in history, is now poised to have a nuclear capability within weeks or months. On October 7<sup>th</sup>, some in the region speculated that Iran might have conducted an underground nuclear test due to recorded earthquake activity.

The People’s Republic of China (PRC) has recently been reported to have three aircraft carriers and hundreds of naval vessels positioned in the East China Sea, threatening the Republic of China (Taiwan) and other nation states in the region. Just this Summer in the wake of a new Taiwanese President being elected, the PRC launched large-scale military drills surrounding Taiwan in what is called ***punishment*** for the nation’s ***separatist acts***.<sup>2</sup> Taking advantage of our withdraw from Afghanistan and perceptions of our weakened state, the PRC has also greatly expanded their presence in Africa, the Middle and Near East.

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<sup>1</sup> 24 September 2024. [Opinion | Robert Gates: The Pentagon and Congress must change their ways - The Washington Post](#)

<sup>2</sup> 23 May 2024, [China starts ‘punishment’ military drills around Taiwan days after island swears in new leader | CNN](#)



### China holds military drills around Taiwan

China has launched naval exercises and a three-day "cruise and patrol" operation in the north and central Taiwan Strait – involving the on-site inspection of commercial shipping and ferry routes



**Russia** is certainly a threat due to its continuing war with the Ukraine, the continuing public threats in the possible use of nuclear weapons. Another issue is the continued drain of U.S. armament and U.S. treasure, as the current administration has poured approximately \$175 Billion into supporting their war effort. In the beginning of October, news agencies are reporting that North Korean has already sent advisors and other troops to Eastern Europe to fight alongside Russian troops in the war with the Ukraine.

Closer to the homeland, **Venezuela's** dictator Madura fraudulently remains in control after threatening and using violence in its recent national election. While the U.S. State Department says won't do anything or admit to this national leader's crimes, he is under pending indictment for illicit narcotics trafficking in the United States.

### Terrorist and Cartel Threats

There are now over 20 recognized terrorist organizations operating around the globe. Not only are several of these groups consolidating and training in their newly acquired safe havens within Afghanistan, but several of these groups are now being directly integrated within the Taliban government that was (until recently) receiving direct cash payments (reportedly some \$25-40 million dollars a week) from the current U.S. administration.

The Taliban government's Ministry of the Interior is being led by a known terrorist leader who has been issuing thousands of valid Afghani passports to terrorists. With legal means to travel around the world, many reported terrorists have been able to travel to Central and South America to make their way over the U.S./Mexico southern border left open by the current administration.

The porous U.S./Mexican border has been the greatest failure of national security in recent decades and has resulted in the flow of millions of unvetted foreign nationals from, not only South and Central America, but from the Middle East, Near East and Asia. In a recently revealed report by U.S. Representative Tony Gonzales in July 2024, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement had almost 700,000 non-U.S. citizens who had criminal histories on their national docket. Over 13,000 of those foreigners are convicted murderers.

While the U.S./Mexican border has received the greatest amount of attention, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol reported encountering 19,498 migrants between border posts on the northern border between October 2023 and July 2024. Most (15,000) of these were in the Swanton Sector, which runs along the Quebec's border with New York and Vermont.<sup>3</sup> In my experience while working counternarcotics at the National Security Agency and additional work in teaching intelligence tactics for northern entry points, when blocked in one area or method, these types of pathways just shift to other easier accesses.

There have been at least six foiled terrorism attacks in Canada since Hamas unleashed the massacre attack on Israel last October 7<sup>th</sup>. It is commonly known that the Trudeau administration does not fully vet foreigners it allows into Canada as well as it should. On September 4<sup>th</sup>, a Pakistani national on a Canadian student visa (Muhammad Shahzeb Khan) was arrested in Quebec. According to authorities, his intent was to travel to New York City to slaughter as many Jews as he could on the one-year anniversary of the October 7<sup>th</sup> attack.<sup>4</sup>

### **Domestic Manmade and Natural Threats**

As witnessed in the two assassination attempts on Republican Presidential candidate Donald Trump, politically motivated violence is a real concern and being increasingly noted by both political parties as problematic. I believe the threat will continue beyond the campaign and election period, but into and through an undetermined post-election and post-inauguration period. This is not dependent on who is elected as radical Left-wing or Right-wing violent extremism is a probability, regardless of who wins the national election.

As we've seen recently in the response to hurricane Helene, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) seems totally overwhelmed in its capabilities to adequately and quickly respond to large scale natural disasters. Had hurricane Milton been worse, I suspect we would have seen FEMA, overwhelmed as it can not properly respond to one large area natural event, no less multiple, near simultaneous large-scale disasters.

Regardless of them being illegals, migrants or undocumented, the fact of the matter is that millions of foreigners are now in the nation due to an open border and an administration that has purposefully allowed them to enter and take residence within our borders. According to NBC News, there are currently 7.5 million illegal immigrants on the U.S.

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<sup>3</sup> 12 September 2024. CBC News. [U.S. border patrol reports record number of encounters with migrants at the Canadian border \(yahoo.com\)](https://www.cbc.com/news/canada-usa/immigration-report-2024-09-12). CBC News

<sup>4</sup> 12 September 2024. Toronto Sun. [HUNTER: U.S. rightly worried terrorists will slip over Canadian border | Toronto Sun](https://www.torontosun.com/news/canada/hunter-u-s-worried-terrorists-will-slip-over-canadian-border)

Immigration and Customs Enforcement's non-detained docket living in the nation.<sup>5</sup> Many believe that there are many more. Most of whom are draining the budgets of states and the federal government. The Federation for American Immigration Reform published that the cost of illegal immigration in 2023 was roughly \$150 billion (or about \$1,000 per each American taxpayer).<sup>6</sup>

The cost of allowing this massive influx of foreigners is just not economic. According to a letter sent after a request by U.S. Representative Tony Gonzalez and ICE testimony to Congress in September, there are currently 425,000 total convicted immigrant criminals on the non-detained docket. Over 13,000 of these not being detained are convicted of homicide. The reason given by ICE for this status is because these immigrants are "not prioritized for detention," serving jail time for some other crime, or because ICE cannot find them.

## **Illicit Narcotics**

While the election, professional sports and natural disasters capture the mainstream news headlines, the illicit narcotics problem in the United States intensifies. Fed by an open southern border, the smuggling of narcotics from the PRC and the thousands of meth labs left operating through the nation's urban and rural facades, people are dying in great numbers and the economic impact is enormous. A National Public Radio story cited federal estimates that 108,000 people died from overdoses under this administration's watch up through 2023. The most commonly reported figure for drug overdose deaths are over 300 per day. When healthcare costs, lost productivity and criminal justice costs are tallied, it has costed the nation's tax-payers \$740 billion.<sup>7</sup>

## **State of the U.S. Intelligence Community (IC)**

The United States not only betrayed a decades-old ally with its rushed withdraw from Afghanistan, but it abandoned almost all of its Human Intelligence (HUMINT) sources in the region. Afghanistan is now actively being used by our closest near-peer nation-state competitor—the People's Republic of China—to strengthen its hold in the region, expand their global position and mine for rare earth metals like lithium.

In abandoning Afghanistan, the U.S. gave all terrorist groups a place to consolidate, plan and train beyond its HUMINT capability and is now reliant on loosely considered allies like Pakistan, which is itself riddled with terrorist collaborators. For the first time since before 9/11, the IC is again overly dependent on HUMINT from allied intelligence and security services for Middle and Southwestern Asian area insight. An over-dependency on other technical means cannot erase the gap created with the loss of direct HUMINT sources.

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<sup>5</sup> 28 September 2024. [More than 13,000 immigrants convicted of homicide are living outside immigration detention in the U.S., ICE says \(nbcnews.com\)](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/immigration/more-than-13-000-immigrants-convicted-homicide-living-outside-immigration-detention-us-ice-says-nbcnews-com-rcna123456), NBC News

<sup>6</sup> March 2023, [The Cost of Illegal Immigration to American Taxpayers 2023 \(fairus.org\)](https://fairus.org/cost-illegal-immigration-2023).

<sup>7</sup> 7 October 2024. [Opinion: Dealing with conundrum of drug crisis – Times News Online \(tnonline.com\)](https://www.timesonline.com/opinion/dealing-with-conundrum-of-drug-crisis) Times News Online

The politically motivated focus of current IC leaders on Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) is resulting in a splintered workforce that sees its time and attention more drawn to required sensitivity training than expanding its expertise and mission orientation on our nation's foreign intelligence adversaries.

## Cybersecurity Concerns



The American public is largely uninformed about the fragility of our national critical infrastructure and systems. Be it from nefarious actors, manmade mistakes or natural disasters, an aging infrastructure combined with a continual patching of new systems on top of legacy systems are exposing vulnerabilities and weaknesses.

As noted by national IC leaders, the PRC has infiltrated and exploited innumerable gaps in both public (government) and private sector critical infrastructure across the nation. In April 2024, FBI Director Wray publicly stated,

*"The fact is, the PRC's targeting of our critical infrastructure is both broad and unrelenting" that "the immense size—and expanding nature—of the CCP's hacking program isn't just aimed at stealing American intellectual property." But "It's using that mass, those numbers, to give itself the ability to physically wreak havoc on our critical infrastructure at a time of its choosing,"*

With the expansion of Artificial Intelligence, hacker capabilities have become more sophisticated while government and civilian-operated systems more vulnerable.

## Military Issues

Our Army is shrinking, our Navy is decommissioning warships faster than new ones can be built, our Air Force has stagnated in size, and only a fraction of the force is available for combat on any given day," former Defense Secretary Robert Gates recently wrote in [The Washington Post](#).

By far, the greatest issues for today's U.S. Armed Forces is two-fold—a weakness in our status as a world leader and the retention and recruitment of a robust and qualified

volunteer force. As former SECDEF Gates said in his Washington Post piece, “As secretary of defense for both Republican and Democratic presidents, I strongly supported allocating more resources for nonmilitary instruments of power — diplomacy, strategic communications, development assistance, geoeconomic tools and more. But it is a fact of life that these instruments are effective only against the backdrop of American military power so compelling that adversaries are deterred from taking up arms against us or our allies.”<sup>8</sup>

In regards to REAL POWER politics, the rushed abandonment of Afghanistan during this administration has badly damaged our alliances and once trusted relationships. Evil-intended adversaries do not respect weakness. In fact, some would say that the perceptions of a weakened United States is a main reason why Russia insists on taking territory; terrorist groups are continuing their evil ways and two-bit dictators continue to abuse their own people. They are confident the U.S. will do nothing....or....worse, that is cannot do anything. We will continue to see more evil lurk out from the shadows as we retreat from the world stage.

### **Conclusion-Opinion**

There is no doubt in my mind that we are facing a threat environment more complex and daunting than at any time in recent history.

## **ORATORICAL**

### **Jeff Holmes**

The results of the department oratorical held at the East Helena High School on Saturday March 30<sup>th</sup> as follows:

- |                 |                                                              |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> | Jaci Pheifer a sophomore from Kalispell and District #4      |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Cate Leydig a sophomore from Big Sky and District #7         |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> | Carmen Katzenberg a sophomore from Harlowton and District #9 |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> | Madison Clement a freshman from Helena and District #6       |

I would like to thank all posts, districts, and participants for continuing the education of our constitution. Obviously, I would also like to encourage more posts to push the oratorical contest in their area. We are amazed to hear the orations but would love to hear more and give away more money to kids.

Secondly, a huge shout out to Erin, East Helena High School, Lowell, Glen, Dick and Lea, and the rest of the members who helped out behind the scenes. The continued success of the Department Oratorical Contest is truly a team effort.

Next year’s Department Oratorical Contest is scheduled to also be held in Helena. Erin has got us the use of East Helena High School at no cost and has starting to create quite the list of available judges do the legislature being in town next year and also with it being an election year. Everyone in Helena is in full on politician mode.

I work for you and try to make your job easier. As always, let me know what I can do to help. We are all in this together.

## **SON OF THE AMERICAN LEGION (S.A.L.) ADVISOR**

### **John Meacham**

At the 2024 Department Convention in Glassgow, MT. the Detachment of Montana convened a meeting to elect a new slate of office as follows. Det. Cmdr - Andy Rice Det. Vice Cmdr – Mike Allison Adj. – Lowell Long Eastern Zone Cmdr – Joe Yeoman Sothern Zone Cmdr – Dan Smart Western Zone Cmdr – Mike Schendel Northern Zone Cmdr – David Driver Finance – Eddy White NEC – John Meacham Alt. NEC – Larry Steel The following is a summary of the reports given during the meeting.

- Membership: Membership is continuing to struggle but we are on goal. We are working with the Legion Riders to help gain more awareness of both programs.
- Finance: There were no changes made to the Detachment budget for the next year.
- Americanism: American Legion Boys State and American Legion Auxiliary Girls State attendance was down with a total of 80 attendees, with 75 completing the course.
- NEC: National is putting out an Online newsletter that can be accessed through mylegion.org. • Cmdr.'s Report: We continue to have a shortfall in CSRs submitted. We need to continue to encourage better communication between the Squadrons and Posts to increase the number of reports submitted.

Nationally we have a new Commander. His name is Joseph Navarrette. He is the first National Detachment Commander from the state of New Mexico. The S.A.L. has reached the 10-million-dollar mark in contributions to the CWF. The new National Commanders project is Veteran and Children Foundation, and he wishes to reach a goal of \$500,000 in the first year. The Detachment of Montana can and will reach our goal for the new membership year. The Leadership of The American Legion and the Sons of The American Legion, The American Legion Auxiliary and The Legion Riders can and will make this a banner year.

## **SHOOTING SPORTS**

### **Larry Dobb**

The American Legion Junior Shooting Sports Program is dedicated to promoting gun safety, marksmanship education, and competitive shooting for young athletes. Participants have the opportunity to compete in various events, including the Postal Match, which serves as a pathway to qualify for the prestigious national championship.

Teams interested in participating in the 2025 season should refer to the official website for registration guidelines and important updates. For information about registration and past performances in Montana, visit the American Legion's Junior Shooting Sports Program page.

The program continues to explore opportunities for expanding scholarship offerings for participants, with announcements forthcoming as details are finalized. The national

championship will once again be hosted at Hillsdale College, a venue aligned with the Legion's values. The event will also feature new cost-saving measures to support participants and their families.

### **VETERANS ECONOMICS/Homeless Veterans Coordinator**

#### **Dan Smart**

Veteran homelessness, as well as National homelessness prevention has been getting better every year with the help of many agencies across many levels. A big push has come from the US Interagency Council on Homelessness which has just pushed through, and adopted, a program called Ending Homelessness Before It Starts: A Federal Prevention Framework. It came about as a way for communities and programs to help keep people in homes and the revolving door of homelessness to a minimum.

The VA budget for fiscal year 2025 is set at 3.2 billion and is a significant investment in ending Veteran homelessness. With that comes questions concerning where that money is allocated and how it is spent. Here are the breakdowns of six types of services according to VA.gov

Permanent housing supportive services that provide Veterans with access to affordable housing and intensive case management to help them remain stably housed

Prevention services to keep Veterans from becoming homeless in the first place

Transitional housing that provides Veterans with temporary, safe places to stay during their search for permanent housing

Treatment, such as health care, mental care, and residential rehabilitative care

Employment and job training to help Veterans obtain meaningful employment

Administrative costs to support our work and fund research

The budget broken down by percentage is, Direct services staff and operational costs for local patient care 61%, grants and contracts for direct services 34%, miscellaneous 4%, and National administrative and operating costs for local patient care 1%

For fiscal year 2024 the Montana VA made significant strides. The Montana VA's goal was to help 230 Veterans, and they ended up housing 249. This was with the help of numerous communities and housing authority partners. This falls right in line with the National VA, which had a goal of placing 41,000 Veterans and ended placing 43,116 Veterans in housing, with a retention rate of 96.3% among Veterans. There is still a long road ahead but is being taken head on.

### **VA HOSPITAL VOLUNTEER REPRESENTATIVES**

The Montana American Legion Voluntary Services Committee has been actively supporting veterans across the state by organizing volunteer efforts in VA Hospitals and Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs). Volunteers dedicate their time and skills to assist veterans with various needs, enhancing their well-being and providing much-needed support to healthcare staff.

Volunteers play a vital role in these healthcare facilities by escorting patients, delivering personal items, assisting with recreational activities, and providing companionship to veterans during their stays. The American Legion's efforts are closely aligned with the mission of the VA to honor America's veterans by providing exceptional healthcare that improves their health and overall quality of life. Montana's volunteers have consistently demonstrated commitment, serving veterans and ensuring that they receive the best possible care.

However, the Montana Department is currently seeking a new chairman for the American Legion Voluntary Services Committee. This role involves coordinating volunteer efforts, recruiting new volunteers, and acting as a liaison between the American Legion, VA facilities, and other organizations. The position is essential in ensuring that volunteer services continue to grow and meet the evolving needs of veterans throughout the state.

If you are interested in the chairman role or know someone who might be, please reach out to the Montana American Legion for more information.

### **WOMEN'S VETERANS COORDINATOR**

#### **Irene Dickerson**

The Women's Veterans symposium was held on May 6th, 2024, at the Laurel post. Approximately ten women veterans attended. We had several guest speakers, including Dallas Knight, author of *Shattered Reflections*; Connie Schulz, Women's Memorial in Washington DC representative; VA representative Karsyn Hornsby; Veterans Advocacy and Public Policy Juliana Mercer; Janet Lassen from HUD-VASH; Karen Pearson, owner of Adaptive performance, Bre Rodriguez, Moral Injury, Michelle Watson & Patricia Janse, veterans upward bounds and Dawn Longie, Concerned Veterans for America. Amy Parson from Zen on the River in Forsyth also taught a yoga class. Because of donations from many of the American Legion posts, we provided a free lunch to the attendees. Overall, we received positive feedback from the attendees.

The 2025 symposium will be in Helena on May 16-18, 2025. Stay tuned for additional information as we put the program together.