

INTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMISSION

Robert E. Newman, Indiana, Chairman

Matthew E. Herndon, Indiana, Director

The National Internal Affairs Commission was established by resolution of the National Executive Committee in 1947. The original charge for this constitutional commission remains: to formulate and recommend policies, and to oversee the implementation of adopted policies relating to activities conducted for organizational purposes.

Among those purposes are all those not properly the responsibility of any other national commission, as well as membership strategies, post formation, clerical and records administration for posts and individual members, and special projects. The commission provides guidance and assistance to the national adjutant on necessary administrative operations. Under the broad interpretation of those purposes not properly the responsibility of other commissions, Internal Affairs oversees awards, constitutional discipline and commemorative activities. The commission also monitors legislative and other regulatory activities that potentially affect Legion posts and departments, recommending appropriate courses of action.

The commission has four standing committees assigned to it for supervision and coordination: American Legion Riders Advisory, National Convention Resolutions Assignment, Constitution and By-Laws, and Membership & Post Activities.

The Internal Affairs Commission also provides guidance for the following programs:

Sons of The American Legion: The Sons of The American Legion (SAL) membership is currently more than 375,563 members worldwide and is at an all-time high. Thirty-eight of the 55 detachments (states) finished at 100 percent, and 19 achieved 105 percent at or above their annual membership goals. The SAL continues with the Buddy Check initiative that reaches out to squadron members and veterans in their communities to check on their health and well-being. It is the SAL, a program of The American Legion, whose fundraising and volunteer efforts support programs such as the Veterans Children & Youth Foundation (VCF), Veterans Affairs Volunteer Services (VAVS), National Emergency Fund (NEF), Legacy Scholarship Fund (LSF), Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW) and Child Welfare Foundation (CWF), to name a few.

According to the activity reported through the SAL's Consolidated Squadron Reports (CSR), SAL squadrons collectively donated cash and volunteered hours to the following:

- **Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation** – volunteered over 849,928 hours equaling over \$21,613,669 in direct labor and over \$118,539 in donations.
- **Veterans Education and Employment** - volunteered over 23,496 hours equaling over \$597,503 in direct labor and over \$1,018,260 in donations.
- **Americanism** - volunteered over 434,685 hours equaling over \$11,054,039 in direct labor and over \$2,674,409 in donations.
- **Child Welfare Foundation** - volunteered over 24,148 hours equaling over \$614,083 in labor directly and over \$1,035,309 in donations.

Across all SAL programs, they volunteered 4,987,268 hours equaling over \$126,826,225 in direct labor based on \$25.43 per volunteer hour and donated over \$7,366,547 that went directly to their communities and supported our veterans and their families.

Since 1932, the Sons of The American Legion have continued to be an integral component of The American Legion Family and to our local communities.

The American Legion Riders: The American Legion Riders (ALR) has organized chapters in over 2,200 American Legion posts and an estimated 122,000 members in 54 departments within 50 states, two U.S. territories and two foreign countries. The American Legion Riders are members of the Legion Family – The American Legion, the Sons of The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary. The ALR is organized into chapters sponsored by individual American Legion posts. ALR members are motorcycle enthusiasts who promote motorcycle safety, volunteer their time by supporting their communities, and participate in organized rides that bring awareness to The American Legion and various veteran causes and youth scholarships.

Annually, the national organization and the ALR advisory committee plan and execute one of the country's largest organized motorcycle runs, the American Legion Legacy Run, held the week before the national convention. Riders from all over the country and overseas participate in this five-day, 1,100-mile ride that treks across the countryside of America.

During the multiple stops along the way, donors present donations to the American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund. This fund provides needs-based scholarships to children of post-9/11 veterans either killed in action or assessed with a 50% or higher service-connected disability rating from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Since 2006, the annual Legacy Run has conducted 17 consecutive runs, traveled over 23,500 miles and raised more than \$17 million for the Legacy Scholarship Fund. In 2023 the fund has been deemed fully funded, and the Legacy Run will shift its fundraising efforts to The American Legion's Veterans & Children Foundation (VCF). Back in 2019, when the government shut down and members of the U.S. Coast Guard were not paid, it was the Temporary

Financial Assistance Fund under VCF that paid out over \$1 million in grants to enlisted E-5 and below with kids to help bridge the gap until Congress voted to resume basic pay for the Coast Guard members. The Riders have always supported the kids of veterans, and VCF falls right in line with their passion.

National Emergency Fund: Since 1989, the National Emergency Fund has provided over \$10 million in grant assistance to American Legion and Sons of the American Legion (SAL) members and American Legion posts across the nation. From Jan. 1-Dec. 31, 2022, The American Legion provided \$261,762 in grant monies to Legion and SAL members and to American Legion posts. During the same period, the National Emergency Fund received donations totaling over \$544,018. This prepares us to support future natural disasters.

Every dollar contributed to the fund is used for providing financial assistance to members of the American Legion Family. The grants are to be used for immediate needs – lodging, food and clothing – and not as a substitute for insurance. In order to qualify, members must have been displaced or evacuated from their primary place of residence and be a member in good standing at the time of loss. Monies to support the administrative costs of maintaining this fund and to conduct fundraising are absorbed through existing budget areas.

The National Emergency Fund is unique, and members know they can turn to The American Legion for immediate financial assistance without payback. Through the generosity of American Legion and Sons of The American Legion members, the National Emergency Fund will continue to meet the needs of our Legion family in the aftermath of local, state and natural disasters.

Consolidated Post Reports: The Consolidated Post Report (CPR) was developed in 1975 to document the various activities a specific post has accomplished during the 12-month reporting period July 1-June 31. The CPR may be the most important post document submitted each year. The combined information is referenced when the national commander and others speak to our representatives and validates our ability to testify on behalf of all veterans. An individual post story and impact is amplified when we speak with a collective voice. During the 2022-2023 reporting year, 67.3% of posts submitted a CPR.

Throughout the reporting year, American Legion post members provided:

- 430,994 volunteer hours provided to our communities
- 100,784 pints of blood donated by 59,835 American Legion members
- 427,467 community service hours at a cost of \$12,585,143
- 143,229 funeral honors performed at a cost of \$2,478,727

- 1,642 American Legion Baseball teams sponsored at a cost of \$5,053,093
- 1,919 Scout units sponsored representing 41,610 Scouts at a cost of \$2,002,090
- \$12,714,490 donated to school-assisted programs and scholarships
- 2,336 Local Oratorical contestants sponsored at a cost of \$314,829
- 15,994 Boys State delegates sponsored at a cost of \$54,151,198
- \$711,106 donated to Temporary Financial Assistance
- \$606,240 donated to the National Emergency Fund
- \$3,569,904 in total donations to Children & Youth activities

National American Legion College: National American Legion College (NALC) annually hosts many talented, ambitious Legionnaires at National Headquarters in Indianapolis for a week of intensive training. They are taught the core values and contributions of the organization and are challenged to think critically and creatively, working as a team in confronting issues and challenges within communities and The American Legion. Upon graduation, the students return to their departments with enhanced knowledge and appreciation for The American Legion. Graduates also stay in contact with each other through social media and networking at national American Legion meetings and events.

Candidates for NALC are veterans who demonstrate the potential or ability to take on higher leadership roles and responsibilities. Applicants are nominated by their respective departments and ranked by a four-person selection committee comprised of a past national commander who chairs the committee and three NALC graduates, one from the last three graduating classes. Annually the committee reviews and ranks more than 75 applications. The highest-scoring applicants fill the 55 seats available. The remaining applicants are placed on an alternate list based on their overall score and are used to fill vacancies in the event a student cannot attend.

In 2022, National American Legion College graduated 55 Legionnaires from 38 departments. To date, over 900 active graduates are making a difference in leadership and membership across the country. Many graduates continue to take on various roles by either teaching, training or mentoring their fellow Legionnaires. They serve in various leadership roles and accept appointments to serve on one of our many commissions and committees at the national and department levels. Graduates are encouraged to utilize their skills and knowledge by coordinating with their fellow graduates to develop training platforms on all levels that benefit and enhance American Legion knowledge and the issues impacting our veterans.

American Legion Training: American Legion members have access to a range of training opportunities, both online and in person, designed to enhance their knowledge and understanding of the organization. Encouraging training at all levels is essential for cultivating a well-informed membership base that comprehends the organization's dynamics and the significance of their involvement. The training section on the website offers downloadable materials tailored for local training at district and post levels.

A notable resource is the "Basic Training" online course. It is a self-paced program available to American Legion Family members at no cost. This program is an invaluable asset for those seeking to expand their comprehension of the nation's largest veterans service organization. Serving as an insightful introductory course, it delves into the organization's history and mission.

"Training Tuesdays" are monthly live webinar events held on the last Tuesday of each month, providing an hour of interactive engagement open to all members. These sessions cover a diverse range of topics relevant to post and district leadership, ensuring members stay informed and well-equipped. During the annual national convention, live training sessions are conducted to engage attendees and encourage members to continue championing The American Legion's mission and values.

This year, a notable addition is the Be the One campaign, representing a transformative leap for American Legion members. This initiative focuses on vital aspects like destigmatizing suicide and embracing innovative health approaches.

The initiative breaks down barriers around discussing suicide, enabling members to better identify signs of distress, provide essential support and facilitate veterans' access to professional assistance. This change in perspective enhances members' awareness and empowers them to actively contribute to veterans' mental health and overall well-being.

In conclusion, Be the One significantly elevates the expertise and empathy of American Legion members. By fostering an informed and compassionate community that can address mental health concerns and advocate novel wellness strategies, this initiative reflects The American Legion's steadfast commitment to serving veterans with excellence.

Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW): In 2022, Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW) approved 62 grant requests totaling \$371,927.27 for veterans and organizations serving veterans' needs in 22 different states, providing everything from entertainment access and essential mobility devices to critical personal care needs. In 2023 through Aug. 14, Operation Comfort Warriors had approved 45 grants totaling over \$335,000.

Every dollar contributed to the fund is used to:

- Demonstrate to wounded warriors that those who have come before them will continue to stand by them in their service to our great nation.
- Support individuals and programs that help wounded warriors wherever they are and in whatever stages of recovery they are in.
- Provide items and events that empower wounded warriors and their families to face their difficulties and come out stronger on the other side.

Few programs illustrate The American Legion’s commitment to wounded, injured or ill military servicemembers and veterans more than Operation Comfort Warriors. OCW defines a “wounded warrior” as those veterans who have or those service members who are still serving honorably in the U.S. Armed Forces and who have become wounded, injured or ill. OCW supplements the high-quality care provided at military and Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities and transition units throughout the United States and abroad. OCW was established to provide “non-essential” items not typically found as a budget line on government spreadsheets.

**NATIONAL CONVENTION RESOLUTIONS ASSIGNMENT
COMMITTEE**

Bruce C. Feuerbach, Iowa, Chairman

The Resolutions Assignment Committee meets at least three days before the convening of the national convention. This committee has the responsibility to receive, consider and transmit all resolutions – with or without recommendation – to the appropriate convention committee for a report to the convention. During an average year, between 200 and 300 resolutions will be assigned.

CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS COMMITTEE

Hon. Vincent M. Gaughan, Illinois, Chairman

The National Constitution and By-laws of The American Legion can only be amended by the duly elected delegates at a national convention.

However, the Constitution & By-Laws Committee, established by authority of the National Executive Committee in 1939, authorizes this committee to study and make proper recommendations concerning all matters that pertain to the constitution and by-laws, as well as matters relating to the *Uniform Code of*

Procedure for the Organization of National Conventions of The American Legion, which provides rules and regulations for the annual national convention.

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MEMBERSHIP & POST ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE

Matthew D. Jabaut, Maine, Chairman

Membership and programs go hand in hand to make The American Legion an organization able to provide people and resources to serve the needs of veterans and their families.

The committee has oversight of the implementation of the recommendations of the 21st Century Relook Committee, whose charge was to update the original 21st Century report and chart the path for membership operations over the next 10 to 15 years.

Membership:

Final 2021 membership – 1,694,048

Final 2022 membership – 1,643,532

2023 membership projection – 1,505,000

60th Annual National Membership Workshop: There were approximately 330 attendees from 52 departments, who were assigned to four different groups: Programs and Membership, Member Engagement, Recruitment and Retention, and District Commander. The workshop was a great success, with those telling us via our survey they enjoyed training pertaining to growing and retaining membership at the post level featuring American Legion programs, as well as briefings on Be the One initiative.

The goal of the workshop remained the same as in the past and that is to provide these essential membership workers with the tools, knowledge and desire to conduct an effective American Legion membership program. Whether they are involved in membership recruitment or program implementation, the workshop teaches Legionnaires to help veterans and provide communities the essential programs to maintain a quality of life for which all veterans fought and served to preserve.

When the workshop concluded, the attendees were prepared to face day-to-day membership challenges with a better understanding of The American Legion as it relates to matters involving the ability to recruit new members and retain the ones who are already members.

New Post Development/Revitalization: The Membership & Post Activities Committee developed a training program in January 1996 designed to assist posts, districts and departments in developing and revitalizing posts. The program provides training workshops to interested volunteers, along with practical, hands-on field application.

The success of the program is evident, based on the many post and district revitalizations and new posts developed in the past 25 years. Many departments have succeeded in revitalizing posts without any direct assistance from National Headquarters staff. Whether departments request field assistance or just send members to the training workshop, positive results follow if they adhere to the guidelines established. All departments are encouraged to participate in this program. However, success requires a commitment from every level of leadership.