

**2023 NATIONAL CONVENTION MISSION DRIVEN
AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY
102ND NATIONAL CONVENTION**



MONDAY, AUGUST 28, 2023

NATIONAL CONVENTION SESSION I

**Charlotte Convention Center
Hall C1
Exhibit Level**

8:30 A.M. - 11:38 A.M.

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CONVENTION PROCEEDINGS

P R O C E E D I N G S

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Good morning.

VOICES: Good morning.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: And welcome to our 102nd National Convention.

Many of you know that Charlotte is the epicenter of NASCAR, but what you might not know is that I'm a huge racing fan. I'm from Indiana --

(Cheering.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: -- so of course the Indy 500 is in my blood, but my love of racing goes far beyond the Indy 500. In fact, my husband and I joke that while we may not agree on everything, we always agree on our love of racing and veterans. So, you can imagine my surprise when they pitched Mission Drive as the 2023 National Convention theme, a theme that combines both my love of racing and veterans. I was onboard right away. The wow. Seeing it today live and in action it just confirms that Mission Driven is the perfect theme of the 2023 American Legion Auxiliary National Convention.

Okay. So, we've covered my love of racing. Now let's turn to my love of veterans. More specifically one of my

favorite veterans. James "Blue" Curry is a talented singer, musician, and solo entertainment act. He performs for corporate events, weddings, festivals, private parties, and today he's going to entertain us.

James served in the United States Air Force for 12 years and has been singing ever since. He started his professional career as a contestant on Showtime at the Apollo and is also a former member of the Petersburg Gospel Singers. He was a founding member of the R&B group, A Touch of Charm, and has performed for over 40 years. He has opened for national recording artists such as the Pointer Sisters, the Manhattans, The Whispers, Betty Wright, Blue Magic, and The O'Jays.

James is a multi-gold medal winning performer at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, and we're so glad he is here with us this morning. From the great state of Virginia, Virginia, please welcome James "Blue" Curry.

(Applause.)

MR. CURRY: Hey, hey. Good morning.

ALL: Good morning.

MR. CURRY: How's everybody? You're looking wonderful. All right. We're going to have a good time this morning, right? So, I want to see you up out of those seats.

All right?

(Medley of God Bless America, The Casson Song, Anchors Away, Semper Paratus, Marine's Hymn, The U.S. Air Force Song, You're a Grand Old Flag, and God Bless America.)

MR. CURRY: Yeah. All right. Yeah. So, you all ready to have a good time again? All right. All right. Look, we're going to talk about a pretty woman. All right? How about that?

ALL: Yeah.

MR. CURRY: We're good?

ALL: Yeah.

MR. CURRY: All right. (Indiscernible). Hey, come on you all. Come on. Let me see you bounce.

(Presentation of Pretty Woman.)

MR. CURRY: Yeah, yeah, you all. Aha. Yeah. Oh, it's so good in here, it's so good here. I see Colorado, Alabama, Hawaii, everybody. Virginia, where you at Virginia? Yeah.

(Presentation of Dancing in the Street).

MR. CURRY: Thank you all so much. All right. Thank you. Oh, yes. Yes.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: James, you are amazing.

MR. CURRY: Thank you.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you for sharing your talents with us. It's a perfect way to open our 2023 National Convention.

MR. CURRY: Thank you.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Another round of applause. Wasn't he awesome?

MR. CURRY: Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you. All right. Thank you.

(Pause.)

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Welcome back to Mission Driven, the 2023 American Legion Auxiliary National Convention. Here to begin our business meeting is me, Vicki Koutz. I should have turned the page earlier.

Good morning delegates and guests. The 102nd National Convention of the American Legion Auxiliary will now come to order.

(Ringing of the bell.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Before we begin our opening ceremonies, I would like everyone to please ensure your

electronic devices have been placed on silent mode. So, if you can do that now please. Thank you.

At this time, we will have the National President's Pages please post the colors.

(Ringing of the bell.)

Our National Chaplain, Karen Peel, will lead us in prayer. Karen?

CHAPLAIN PEEL: This is the beginning of a new day. God has given us this day to use as we will. We can waste it, or we can use it for good. What we do today is important because we are exchanging a day out of our lives for it. When tomorrow comes, this day will be gone forever and in its place something that we have traded. We want it to be a gain, not a loss. Good, not evil. Success and not failure. Please bow your head and pray with me.

Dear Heavenly Father, today as we come to you in prayer, we are thankful that we can gather here in Charlotte to celebrate our year of service. We are so grateful for our President Vicki, for her leadership and the time that she has given to our organization, veterans, and members.

Father, we ask your blessing upon our member who could not be with us this week. Those who need your healing touch,

may they feel your healing touch and bring us all together again soon.

Please guide and direct this convention, Lord. May we see and feel your presence here among us. We are grateful for an opportunity to serve our veterans and honor the mission of the American Legion Auxiliary.

Thank you, Father. We pray for this in your most holy name.

Amen.

ALL: Amen.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Please remain standing as Ashley Sti leads us in the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by the singing of our National Anthem led by James Curry and the reciting of our preamble led by National Constitution and By-Laws Chairman, Diana Sirovina. Ashley?

MS. STI: With your hand over your heart please join me in the Pledge of Allegiance.

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

MR. CURRY: O say can you see by the dawn's early light, What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last

gleaming, Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the
perilous fight, O'er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly
streaming, And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in
air, Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there,
O, say does that star spangled banner yet wave, O'er the land of
the free and the home of the brave.

(Applause.)

MS. SOROVINO: 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 100 percent
Americanism; to preserve the memories and incidents of our
associations of 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 participate in and contribute to the
accomplishment of the aims and purposes of the American Legion;
to consecrate and sanctify our association by our devotion to
mutual helpfulness.

(Ringing of the bell.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: It is my honor this morning to present the 2022/2023 National Officers of the American Legion Auxiliary.

National Historian Laura Susie Clyde, South Dakota.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: National Chaplain, Karen Peel of Ohio.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Central Division National Vice President Ann Rehbein, of Iowa.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Eastern Division National Vice President Veronica Gurney, of Maine.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Northwestern Division National Vice President Marlene Boyer, of North Dakota.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Southern Division National Vice President Linda Smiley, from South Carolina.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Western Division National Vice President Eva Wallace, of Washington.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: National Secretary Coral May Grout,
of Massachusetts.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: National Treasurer Marybeth Revoir,
of Illinois.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: And National Vice President Lisa
Williamson, of Alaska.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: And please welcome our special guest
National Headquarters Executive Director Sara Riegel and our
Professional Registered Parliamentarian Chris Dickey.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: And of course, I can't forget my
amazing Pages Lisa Liford as the Chairman.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Tanna Sheperd.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Jane Ann Hamby.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: And Susi Greathouse.

(Applause.)

And a big thank you to all the National Chairmen who arrived early this morning to greet all of our attendees.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Good morning. It feels like yesterday I was on a stage almost identical to this one, getting installed as your 102nd National President. I can't believe an entire year has gone by.

For those of you who know me know I'm just a simple country girl from a small rural town in the Midwest. I'm active in my unit. I love my God, my family and my country. So, while I can assure you, I am extremely grateful to serve as the National President, this past year has been about as far from my comfort zone as I have ever been. But, I did it.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: I was able to push my boundaries, go outside my comfort zone, and do things that I never would have thought possible. all because I was Mission Driven.

My love for our veterans and military and my deep connection to our mission put me in the driver's seat this past year, and I never let off the gas. It was a thrilling, eye-opening and, yes, sometimes exhausting experience. I am so

grateful for the opportunity to travel across the nation and witness our amazing members in action, and I can't wait to celebrate all that we have achieved this past year.

So, let's get started. Let's start by welcoming some very special guests to the stage. Please welcome North Carolina Department President Mary Bartlett. Mary?

(Applause.)

MS. BARTLETT: Good morning.

ALL: Good morning.

PRESIDENT BARTLETT: Good Morning. What a pleasure it is to have each of you in my home state.

For those of you who are racing fans, NASCAR is the -- North Carolina is the home of NASCAR and we're proud of it. For those -- when you're walking down the street in Charlotte you may run into Richard Petty, Kyle Petty, or any other race car driver who makes their home in Charlotte or in Morrisville.

In North Carolina, we know about putting the pedal to the metal and coming in for pit stops. We also know what it is to be in the winner's circle. NASCAR is a huge supporter of our veterans, and they plan events around our veterans. If you get a chance, please visit the Charlotte Motor Speedway, and see zMAX Dragway, that's my favorite. It is racing at its finest;

and if racing isn't your speed, North Carolina has other features as well.

We have mountains and we have beaches all within a handful of hours from here in Charlotte. We really have the best of both worlds. We have beautiful big cities like Charlotte and Raleigh. We have wonderful small towns like Hickory and Hendersonville. We are the first in flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. North Carolina is the birthplace of Pepsi Cola in New Bern, North Carolina. Lance Crackers that we all enjoy so much, are from right here in Charlotte.

Again, I welcome you to the great State of North Carolina. May you have fun and may you enjoy your stay.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Next, please welcome our National Convention Chairman Jill Puett. Jill?

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN PUETT: Good morning.

ALL: Good morning.

CHAIRMAN PUETT: Madam National President Vicki, dignitaries, guests, and Auxiliary members. On behalf of the Department of North Carolina, welcome to Charlotte. We are

happy to host this year's National Convention and what is referred to as the Queen City.

You will notice around town the Queen, found like at the street signs, many other places around town. The Queen City has lived up to its long-established nickname since its founding in 1768 when America was still under British rule.

Since King George III's wife was named Queen Charlotte, the nickname was built into its identity. If you flew into Charlotte, you probably saw the statue at the Charlotte Airport of Queen Charlotte.

Charlotte is a racing town. We hope you will take time to visit the NASCAR Hall of Fame. The Charlotte Motor Speedway hosts the Coca Cola 600 in May and the American ROVAL 400 in October with many other races in between.

The NFL Carolina Panthers football team games are played in the beautiful Bank of America Stadium. The Charlotte Knights baseball team plays at the Truist Field, and we hope you get some tickets and get to visit with a game while you're here. The NBA Charlotte Hornets play their games in the Spectrum Center here in uptown Charlotte. The Charlotte Checkers hockey team plays their games in the Bojangles Coliseum. The Quail Hollow Club here in Charlotte is host to the PGA Wells Fargo

Championship. Charlotte now has FC soccer as of March, 2022, and they use the Bank of America Stadium.

Charlotte is an exciting place to be if you're looking for something to do, and while you're here we hope that you will find it an exciting place to visit and dine. Uber, taxis, and light rail are available to make travel easy, so enjoy.

It takes many volunteers to put on a convention of this size, and I appreciate each one of them, and I would like to introduce to you my dedicated team. So please hold your applause until the end. Vice Chairman Janice MacLeod, local Page Chairman Tammy Snider, co-Chairman Debbie Harris, (indiscernible) Chairman Marie Wright, co-Chairman Lolita Jenkins, and the National President's driver Toni Reale.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN PUETT: Our local Pages will be noticeable as they are sporting the racing checkered scarf and flag. They are here to assist you.

Madam National President Vicki, thank you very much for trusting me to be your National Convention Chairman. I very much appreciate this honor. Have a wonderful time here in Charlotte everyone and enjoy this convention.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: We will again be utilizing the electronic voting system. Your Delegation Chairman should have already picked up your voting keypads before today's session began and each delegate should have a keypad. Remember that Convention Standing Rule No. 16 states that voting keypads are not to be removed from the assembly hall and that each department's delegation chairman is responsible for all keypads issued to their department.

Departments will be charged \$150, a donation to the ALA's co-sponsorship of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival for each missing keypad. So be sure to count them before you turn them into the Election Committee at the end of the day.

We will be using the Number 1 key for a yes vote and the Number 2 key for a no vote. If you choose to abstain from voting, please simply do not press any keys. Now if you press the wrong key on the keypad, wait a moment and then press the correct number. The keypad will register only the last key pressed.

Now, let's practice. In what year did the stock car racing become North Carolina's official state sport? Press number key 1 for 2006, press Number 2 key for 2011. Please vote

now.

(Pause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: If you guessed 2011, you are correct. North Carolina quickly became the center of the NASCAR world because of its proximity to all the racing venues, and in 2011 stock car racing became the official state sport.

All right. Next on the to do list is the adoption of the reports which organize the convention. The Credentials Report will be presented by Credentials Chairman Breanda Collins from the Department of South Carolina. Brenda?

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN COLLINS: Madam National President, the Credentials Committee met Saturday, August 28th and the following is our report.

Alabama, 9; Alaska, 9; Arizona, 16; Arkansas, 7; California, 19; Colorado, 9; Connecticut, 9; Delaware, 9; District of Columbia, 6; Florida, 35; Georgia, 10; Hawaii, 6; Idaho, 7; Illinois, 21; Indiana, 23; Iowa, 20; Kansas, 12; Kentucky, 11; Louisiana, 9; Maine, 11; Maryland, 21; Massachusetts, 10; Michigan, 25; Minnesota, 23; Mississippi, 8; Missouri, 11; Montana, 8; Nebraska, 17; Nevada, 6; New Hampshire, 12; New Jersey, 12; New Mexico, 9; New York, 30;

North Carolina, 11; North Dakota, 12; Ohio, 32; Oklahoma, 8;
Oregon, 10; Pennsylvania, 45; Puerto Rico, 6; Rhode Island, 6;
South Carolina, 10; South Dakota, 13; Tennessee, 8; Texas, 17;
Utah, 7; Vermont, 10; Virginia, 11; Washington, 12; West
Virginia, 9; Wisconsin, 20; Wyoming, 8, for a total delegates of
714.

Madam President, on behalf of the Credentials
Committee, I move that the role of delegates hereby submitted be
the official delegate allotment for this convention.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Madam President?

Mike two. Microphone two. Indiana was read at 23, and we do
have 33.

CHAIRMAN PUETT: I do apologize. It is 33.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The question is on the adoption of
the Credential Committee's report as presented. Is there any
discussion? The question is on the motion to --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Madam President?

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Microphone, can you tell me which
microphone because --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Microphone two.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Yes.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Please correct the Department

of Delaware delegates to eight.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: I think you said nine.

CHAIRMAN PUETT: I do apologize. Thank you.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Are there any others that we missed? Thank you. The question is on the motion to adopt the report of the Credentials Committee. All those in favor, press the Number 1 key on your voting pad. Those opposed, press number 2. Please vote now.

(Music.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Okay. The voting is closed. Please show the results. It looks like the yeses were 100 percent and the noes were zero percent. There is a majority in the affirmative. The motion is carried and the Credentials Report for the 2023 National Convention has been adopted. Thank you, Brenda.

CHAIRMAN COLLINS: Thank you, Madam President. Thank you.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Rules Chairman John Tester, Department of Vermont, will present the proposed rules for this convention.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TESTER: Good morning.

ALL: Good morning.

CHAIRMAN TESTER: Madam President, the rules are printed on pages 20 and 21 of the Legion Family Program. Madam National President, by direction of the Rules Committee, I move the adoption of the National Convention Rules for 2023 as printed.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The question is on the adoption of the National Convention Rules for 2023 as printed. Is there any discussion?

(Pause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: All those in favor, please press the number 1 key on your voting pad. Those opposed, please press number 2. Please vote now.

(Music.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The voting is now closed. Please show the results. The yeses 99 percent, and the noes one percent. There being two-thirds in the affirmative, the motion is carried and the Rules for the 2023 National Convention have been adopted. Thank you, John.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: National Secretary Coral May Grout

will give the Convention Agenda Report.

SECRETARY GROUT: Good morning.

ALL: Good morning.

SECRETARY GROUT: Please refer to the agenda that was distributed to all delegation secretaries during registration. The delegation secretaries were charged with distributing this agenda to their delegates and alternates.

I move the adoption of the agenda as printed, with changes noted. Is there a second?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Second.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The question is on the motion to adopt the agenda as printed. Are you ready for the question? The question is on the motion to adopt the agenda as printed. All those in favor, please press number 1 on your keypad. Those opposed press number 2. Please vote now.

(Music.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Voting is now closed. Please show the results. The affirmative is 99 percent, and the nays is one percent. The affirmative has it and the Convention Agenda is adopted. By adoption of these reports, the 102nd National Convention of the American Legion Auxiliary is officially organized for conducting business. Thank you.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: We saw many wonderful inspirational ideas. Our Membership Committee went above and beyond to enhance our membership strength. To give us more insight into this program, please welcome National Membership Chairman Linda Tome. Linda?

CHAIRMAN TOME: Thank you, Madam President. I was ready to keep dancing. Thank you, members, and good morning.

ALL: Good morning.

CHAIRMAN TOME: First up, I'd like to thank Madam President for selecting such an amazing team for this Membership Committee. So enthusiastic, dedicated, focused, and creative. I'd also like to thank the national staff for all their work this year as well. Just an amazing team. Thank you for all your support.

So, I asked for some pictures and boy did I get them. Thank you so much to everyone. Fortunately, or unfortunately, I had to go through all of them several times to figure out which pictures and stories grabbed me for this report. They were all so fabulous. You all have gone above and beyond, and I truly appreciate all your efforts in your reporting and recruiting efforts. It's the little things, and your efforts were amazing.

So, let's get started. The Unit President from Unit 7 from the Department of New Hampshire with 440 members were so concerned about getting 100 percent that they sent out "We Miss You" postcards. Well, it worked. They reached 100 percent. Thank you so much for those extra efforts. Congratulations.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: Then we have Unit 20, Fort Gibson, Department of Oklahoma. They utilized one of their 65-year-old members to call all their members who had not sent in their dues. Katherine Hendrix (phonetic) stated that it made her feel like she was doing something good for the Auxiliary since she was unable to get out as often as she used to. She also sent the membership cards out with a beautiful handwritten note thanking them for their membership. I understand that Katherine has been a great mentor and a great leader through the years. Thank you, Katherine, for your continuous dedication to this organization.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: As I said, it's the little things. We have the Department of Wyoming asking their members to be fully dressed. When I saw that written up, I thought, oh, my gosh. So, I wasn't quite sure what that meant when I first read the

report, so I had to obviously read a little bit more. So never leave home without a membership application in your pocket or purse. That is being fully dressed. So, thank you Wyoming for being fully dressed.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: Then we have the Department of Illinois who really went all out and caravanned over 1,600 miles in February as an American Legion Family across their state making 19 stops and collecting 249 Auxiliary memberships which included 26 new seniors and six new juniors. They also handed out awards for meeting goals by their February travels. Way to go Department of Illinois and congratulations.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: Then we go down south to the Department of Texas who had a membership table at the City of Pasadena's Chamber of Commerce Business Exposition. That's really getting the word out to a lot of people including the mayor of who the ALA is, what we do, and why we matter. So, thank you, Department of Texas.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: But I do want to tell you about a couple of my favorite membership themes. Wisconsin had a great

pin promotion to get members excited about membership this year. Their mascot was a gnome, a GNOME pin which stands for "Getting New and Old Members Excited." By the end of September, they had already handed out 45 pins to their member; and they were just getting started. Those GNOMEs were popping up all over the state at meetings, social events, work parties, training sessions, poppy distributions, memorial service, and more. GNOMEs were taking over Wisconsin.

Everyone who recruited a new member received a GNOME to proudly wear on their lapel. The entire Legion Family was eligible to earn a pin for recruiting a new Auxiliary member, and many Legionnaires have a GNOME sitting on their Legion caps. Membership tables have been staffed by GNOMEs of all sizes, all shapes, opening the door to conversation about the entire Legion Family and the vital programs we support.

Their mid-winter conference had a table loaded with GNOMEs. Flat GNOME, a paper representation of their mascot, travelled the state answering questions, sharing in celebrations, and made visiting units a special occasion. Raffles and giveaways featuring GNOMEs were a big hit to help raise funds, starting conversation, and fellowship.

Everyone has a GNOME story to share. In fact, I do

too. I absolutely love GNOMEs. So, guess who ended up recruiting a friend from Wisconsin to join her local unit. Yep. That would be me. I proudly wear my little GNOME pin; and, yes, it does start a discussion and many conversations about our organization.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: All right. So as of June 1st, Wisconsin has recruited over 644 members and 69 new and excited junior members. Congratulations.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: And, of course, with Madam National President's Mission Driven theme, many of our departments used the racing theme. Like the Department of Georgia. Oh, yes, there was mischief in none other than Thunderbolt, Georgia on a Saturday night. District One, Sabrina Brown-Putney, Vicki Koutz and Department President Pat Morgan are pictured holding racing cars around the Georgia racetrack. They describe this event in one word, priceless. I love the expression on President Pat's face. To me that's priceless.

And the Department of Maine, whose theme was Racing for Membership, used a racetrack and pushpins for the district cars to indicate just how close to the finish line the districts

were each week. Looks like the 6th District, the green car, hit 100 percent ahead of others. Congratulations.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: And of course, Indiana had to get into the racing theme as well and was said to race under the lights in the Hoosier Membership 100. Each district had their own race car cut out for their fall conference and race for the membership trophy throughout the year, and that's how we do it. Just have fun.

In North Carolina, Unit 175 recruited new members while handing out coffee. Their junior members get in on the action, too. They help to attract potential members in hopes of increasing the Legion Family. What a great idea.

And we have a few departments that like to dress up for membership. Unit 140 in Kansas held a membership drive along with an ugly dress ball. They sold out in a week. Sounds like fun. They not only raised money for their scholarship fund from ticket sales, but they also gained new members. It was reported to be a very successful event for the Unit, and I understand the town is still talking about it.

Mighty Minnesota membership. They busted out their flannel shirts and worked together as a Legion Family this year

as they promoted the traits of Paul Bunyon's larger than life folklore story who was depicted as a person who was well known for his strength, speed, and skill and did not quit; and their members have done just that. They did not quit. Thank you.

Unit 1990 from the Department of Mississippi marched in the Veteran's Day parade and displayed their big and bright posters. This picture actually looks like an ad, doesn't it? I absolutely love it. Look at those smiles. Way to go Department of Mississippi.

Has the membership been kind of fun this year, and how fun is it to share your excitement of this organization with others in hopes that they will join. Speaking of membership being fun, who wants a chance to win a paid up for life membership, a PUFL. At the American Legion Auxiliary luncheon on Tuesday, you will have a chance to win a PUFL membership, one for yourself or you can even gift it to anyone. The development team at National Headquarters will be selling a chance to win tickets. One chance for \$10, two chances for 15, or three chances for 25, and you can purchase these tickets during the luncheon. The National President will announce the winner at the end of the luncheon so make sure to get your tickets early and may ~~be~~ the odds be ever in your favor.

And so, I know you've been waiting for this. I would like to give you some numbers before I close. What do you think? Okay. All right. Okay. First off, I'm very excited to say that we had 100 percent reporting. Woo-hoo.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: Thank you so much, and we had 30 new charters this year and 25 re-chartered units this year. Great Job. I know it's a lot of hard work so thank you so much.

And we had 67 recipients for the Ten Plus Three in 2023 award this year, and you thought it was going to be so hard. So that means that we have 670 brand new senior members and 201 brand new junior members added to our membership rosters this year because of this special award. Thank you to all for the Ten Plus Three award recipients. Great job. You should have received a special gift already from this Membership Chairman.

All right. So by July 4th, we had 16 departments hit 100 percent of their goal.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: Woo-hoo. And they received a check for \$500 to advance the ALA mission. Congratulations. And as of yesterday, we have 18 departments now at 100 percent of the

goal. Give yourselves a hand.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: Oh, but wait. There's more. Can we have a drum roll, please? We had 11 departments at 102 percent of the goal or higher 30 days prior to convention. They were Alaska, Arizona, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Maryland, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Virginia. Congrats -- I've got goose bumps right down my legs -- congratulations. Great job.

So, on that very high note, there are just a few more numbers I would like to share with you. One more drum roll, please. Okay. Just received word about our membership count and as of yesterday, for 2023 we have 553,324 members in this organization --

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: -- and we are at 97.76 percent of our goal. Congratulations. Absolutely amazing, and I can't thank you enough. Oh, and we have 1,798 members ahead of where we were last year, so it's pretty awesome.

And I know you've been waiting for the division challenge because every week I hear it, and every week you see it on Facebook page.

So, in fifth place, Northwest Division 90.07 percent. In fourth place, the Central Division 95.25 percent. Third place, Eastern Division, you had 100 percent, 100.25 percent. Second place, Southern Division 102.31 percent, and that means in first place is Western.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: So let me just tell you about your percentages -- I do have to say that. So Southern Division, this is really good, 102.31 percent. Western Division, 102.35 percent.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: What a race, huh? Congratulations, all! This has been a very busy but a fun and fabulous year because of all of you, our members, and from the bottom of, oh boy, from the bottom of my heart, thank you all so very much for all that you do and for your commitment to the growth and future of the American Legion Auxiliary.

National President Vicki, all these efforts were for the good of the organization and you. I know you've been waiting at the end of Vicki's victory lane for the checkered flag. Well, today is the day. You get your checkered flag.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: Madam President, this concludes my platform remarks. However, I would like to take this time to recognize our Goal Department.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Linda, I was thinking the same thing. Why don't we announce each Goal Department and have them stand up while the audience congratulates them with a round of applause. Sound good?

CHAIRMAN TOME: I think that sounds fantastic, Madam President. Would you like to do the honors and start us off?

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: I would love to. Let's put our hands together for the District of Columbia. President Ariane Sweeney, Membership Chairman Barbara Rich. Please stand.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: The Department of New Mexico President Judy Casados and Membership Chair Consuelo Lemaire. Please stand.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The Department of Florida, President Jane Hardacre, Membership Chair Stacey Cusano.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: And the Department of Alaska, President Anarene Robinson, Membership Chair April Sinclair.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The Department of Arizona.
President Barbara White, Membership Chair Rose Ficklin.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: Department of Michigan. President
Marcy Jorae, Membership Chair Robin Basarabska-Briff.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The Department of New Hampshire.
Terry Oullette, Membership Chair Karyl Horn.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: The Department of Delaware. Please
stand President Linda Shelly, Membership chair Donna DiFrancis.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The Department of Virginia President
Pamela Elam Lipscombe, Membership Chair Nalena Klaas.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: Department of Pennsylvania. President
Kelly Moyer, Membership Chairman Georgeann Herling.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The Department of Maryland.
President Carmin Brittain, Membership Chair Joanne Weis.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: The Department of Texas. President Myra Cooper, Membership Chairman Carlene Ashworth.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The Department of California. President Gloria Williams, Membership Chair Maureen O'Brien-Sacco.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: Department of Colorado. President Bettina Kossow, Membership Chair Nancy Diefenderfer.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The Department of Alabama. President Donna Hinkle, Membership Chair Vicke Thower-Mills.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN TOME: Department of North Carolina. President Mary Bartlett, Membership Chair Evelyn Lewis.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: And finally, the Department of Hawaii. President Brister Thomas, Membership Chairman Erin Simonds.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Congratulations to all our Goal Departments. This is a huge accomplishment, and all of the

members should be so very proud. Thank you all. Thank you, Linda.

CHAIRMAN TOME: Thank you, thank you. I love this. I had so much fun.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: This year our ALA juniors were definitely in the driver's seat as they worked diligently to fulfill the mission and positively impact our veterans and service members. We can learn a lot from our juniors. After all, they are our future leaders. Here to tell us more about our future leaders is National Junior Activities Chairman Starr Purnell. Starr?

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN PURNELL: Madam National President. Your focus this year was to honor our veterans every day with a special emphasis on the companions of the veterans attending the Veterans Creative Arts Festival.

The Juniors Activities Committee and the juniors of this great nation put the pedal to the metal and took off racing with ideals, events, and activities.

To tie into the National President's focus, a limited edition VCAF patch was designed and introduced. Juniors on the

patch were raising \$5 for every year of their age with proceeds to support veterans' companions at VCAF. The total raised by Juniors was nearly \$5,000.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN PURNELL: There were numerous other patches that juniors could earn from the three age group levels. The technology patch was discontinued this year because, let's face it, the kids know more than us about technology. The new digital media patch for Level 1 kindergarten through third grade was introduced.

Maryland's, Henry Sodin, was the first to earn the new digital media patch. Americanism continues to be the most popular patch to earn with community service, leadership, and poppy vying for second place. In all, 996 patches were earned in 26 departments.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN PURNELL: During our National Junior Meeting, the juniors have the opportunity to make Open When cards, decorate canvas patches, made poppy bracelets and photo picture frames to be given to the companions of veterans. They also worked on their team building skills and performed the POW/MIA ceremony and Military Child's table setting. They met and

bonded with other juniors in their divisions and learned so much about the Auxiliary programs.

Juniors Around the Country has been hard at work serving all veterans. The Junior Cubs of Illinois reached out with hugs of gratitude by decorating canvas bags that included a card and a bear for the veterans around their states.

Juniors in Florida had the opportunity to see and learn about the travelling replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Moving Wall. During the history lesson about the wall, juniors was given a name to find and print out. They were educated on the acronyms POW, MIA and KIA.

Juniors in Minnesota took an active role in speaking and supporting veteran issues by participating in their annual Veterans Day at the Capital. They had the opportunity to speak with State representatives about military and veterans' affairs. These young ladies were indeed the voices of our veterans.

In New Hampshire, junior membership has increased due to juniors designing a flier explaining the benefit of being a junior member. The fliers were distributed to their classmates and friends along with membership information. Their Sock of Love project, where they collected countless toiletries and stuffed in socks for homeless shelters, definitely was a

service, not self, project.

Alaska juniors had a Military Child's ice cream social to honor military children and made cards that were sent to the Honor Flight mail bags for veterans.

Service to our veterans and their families is continually being done by juniors all over this nation. From baking cookies, painting rocks, folding flags, making crafts, collecting pajamas, sending care packages, supporting honor flights, and countless other activities, the juniors have made a difference in the lives of our veterans and their children.

I have a special announcement. The 2023/2024 Honorary Division Vice Presidents. Here we go. From Central Division, Evelyn Hinshaw from Indiana. Eastern Division, Emily Savage, Pennsylvania. Northwestern Division, Anastasia Donnelly, Minnesota. Western Division, Leah Rosales, Arizona.

(Applause.)

Madam President Vicki, thank you for the Committee appointees who worked with me and for giving me this appointment. It has truly been an honor to serve.

This concludes my platform remarks, but before I go, I want you to meet one of our extra special juniors. Please watch the screen.

(Video begins.)

NARRATOR: In the mid-1950s, a Japanese teacher developed a theory of music education based on the ability relative ease of very young children to speak. Little kids were taught to play the violin in kindergarten, and they picked it up quickly.

Abigail Johnson, a 15-year-old American Legion Auxiliary junior member from Blue Grass, Iowa, explains why technology is so natural to her.

ABIGAIL JOHNSON: It's so much easier to learn how to use technology when you've grown up with it. Heck, I've practically been using technology since I was born.

NARRATOR: Inspired by her grandfather, a Vietnam veteran, she founded Veterans Tech Support designed to help a vulnerable population navigate through the constantly changing world of technology.

ABIGAIL JOHNSON: It all started in my home unit in Blue Grass, Iowa, Post 911.

GARY BERNDT: When Abby first approached us, she was only fourteen years old; but we knew from her experience with being in our Auxiliary, that she could carry this through. So, we jumped onboard immediately, and she's been using us as her

guinea pig, as she calls it, ever since.

NARRATOR: Abigail answers questions on a variety of topics ranging from computer use, internet security, and Smartphone navigation. Veterans Tech Support was taken to a new level after receiving grants totaling over \$20,000.

ABIGAIL JOHNSON: These grants have allowed me to buy 16 laptop computers, three heavily secured laptop carts, printers, projectors, and other organization specific needs.

NARRATOR: Abigail's impact on others is remarkable, starting with her grandfather, a combat-injured Vietnam veteran.

MIKE LAKE: Abby has always had a very big heart and just a will to help all kinds of people.

TERRY RUCKOLDT: I consider myself computer illiterate, and I'm amazed that after this class that the knowledge I have now from the 16-year-old is just fantastic.

ABIGAIL JOHNSON: It's so rewarding to be able to see my students in these classes progress from barely knowing how to turn on a computer to being on the level of some of my peers at school. I'm really so proud of them.

NARRATOR: And speaking of pride.

SALLY JOHNSON: Abigail's intelligence, drive, and passion astound me every day. I'm incredibly proud of the work

that she is doing.

ABIGAIL JOHNSON: What I get out of this, it's the self-satisfaction of knowing that I've helped our veterans who have helped keep our country safe and free.

NARRATOR: Abigail's energy and joy to serve veterans is tangible. But her involvement as an American Legion Auxiliary Junior member has impacted her as well.

ABIGAIL JOHNSON: Being a Junior Member has allowed me to connect with so many other patriotic youth across national, regional, district, and local levels.

NARRATOR: To say the least, Abigail is one busy student.

ABIGAIL JOHNSON: I'm currently a sophomore at Davenport North High School and somehow I'm in 17 activities such as varsity cheer, varsity tennis, being the State President of Children of the American Revolution of Iowa, being a State Officer for the International Order of the Rainbow for Girls. I'm in so many clubs. I'm going to be next year's editor-in-chief of the yearbook and I'm going to be next year's junior class president.

NARRATOR: Abigail's promising future and the long-term growth of Veterans Tech Support look bright.

ABIGAIL JOHNSON: In the future, I hope that Veterans Tech Support is able to expand all across the country. Even though I won't be as involved because I'll be in college, I know that the volunteers that are so integral to Veterans Tech Support will keep it alive.

NARRATOR: Besides college and the promising future, Abigail has one more thing on her to-do list.

ABIGAIL JOHNSON: And when I'm old enough I'm going to be an American Legion Auxiliary Senior Member.

(Video ends.)

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN PURNELL: Please welcome our 2022/2023 National Junior Member of the Year from the Department of Iowa, Abigail Johnson.

MS. JOHNSON: Thank you, Ms. Purnell. I am honored to have been chosen as your 2022/2023 junior member of the year.

It is true. I can't wait until I'm a senior member. I've been basically participating as one since I joined my unit because of the lack of other junior involvement.

As you heard my grandfather, Mike Lake, was in Vietnam, he held a celebration of 50 years since his service ended with the loss of his leg that he affectionately named his

Coming Off Party. At this celebration, I fell in love with the Auxiliary and what it does for veterans. My mother and I weren't members at the time but, and while it took me almost a year to persuade her, I got us signed up and even convinced my grandmother to start attending meetings with us. I was 12 at the time and pulled my family into a life of ALA service.

I started volunteering at every monthly breakfast and annual dinner I could, baked goods for the bake sales, sold quilt raffle tickets, collected items for the garage sales, participated in Read Across America, and ended up being the head of our Poppy Committee where this year I spent 19 hours outside of grocery stores and gas stations distributing.

My grandparents are still only occasionally active, but my mom comes with me to all of the events and my dad's even joined the Sons.

(Applause.)

MS. JOHNSON: Since the creation of Veterans Tech Support in 2022, I have been to district, state, and national meetings for the very first time and my involvement has skyrocketed. During Covid, I, like many others, felt the isolation of not being able to stay active with the organizations that I loved, and I worried about the members of

my local Legion who weren't able to use the technology that the demands of Covid were forcing upon them.

When I won that first grant, I was allowed to choose how I spent my funds, well, how I spent the funds. I decided that instead of using it all on myself and my education, I wanted to give back to the members of my Legion and decided to create Veterans Tech Support. At the time, I wasn't thinking beyond my home unit, but as soon as I realized the impact and need, I knew in my heart it needed to be more. I didn't create Veterans Tech Support to win any awards or help with any other organizations volunteer service hours, I simply saw a need and I filled it.

Since the filming of the video, you just saw, I have raised more funds for Veterans Tech Support and have made important contacts with technology leaders to further the project. I am working with Iowa lawmakers on larger scale grants seeking corporate donations and partnerships and doing everything I can to -- everything I possibly can to expand Veterans Tech Support into a long-lasting, far-reaching organization.

I just started my junior year of high school last week, and I know the journey for Veterans Tech Support will be

long, but you supporting this endeavor means the world to me.

Hearing from my Post commander that people had called the Post seeking membership or started to come back after hearing about Veterans Tech Support on the news, seeing the a-ha moment on people's faces when they're able to achieve something they didn't think they could on the computer, the pride on an Auxiliary member's face who is able to print photos for the first time, sitting with a veteran who shared how being connected virtually with others helps them in dark times and they want to expand that experience to others is what Veterans Tech Support is all about.

It started with my junior membership in the American Legion Auxiliary, and it will continue when I become a senior member, but it is so much more than that. It is embedded in the teachings that I hear at every meeting and embodied by our devotion to mutual helpfulness.

Thank you all for teaching me how to serve, how to stand up and be a leader, and most of all how to honor and love our veterans.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you, Starr, for your report and for introducing all of us to Abigail. Isn't she an

inspiration?

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The American Legion Auxiliary Girls State Program focuses on making grassroots connections and forging relationships with the communities to increase membership as well as awareness. Let's welcome ALA National Girls State and Girls National Chairman, Donna Dillard, for more information. Donna?

CHAIRMAN DILLARD: Good morning. Madam National President Vicki. We are back. With tireless work ethics, adjusting programs to fit today's evolving social changes, and new and innovative ideas, our Girls State Program leaders have put the pedal to the metal, and they have delivered.

We are proud to report that many Girls State programs across the nation are at or nearing their pre-pandemic enrollment numbers. While still valuing tradition and keeping the core program intact, ALA Girls State leaders have incorporated new ideals into their programs. They have broadened the opportunities for their citizens by offering different avenues to explore.

Illinois hosted a career fair for their citizens. They invited different careers such as police officers, civic

employees, radio staff, social workers, law students, and court reporters. Those who presented were encouraged to bring handouts for the girls to take as they considered various career paths.

States have recognized that social media is what fuels our youth today, and they work hard to get the message out on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. If you perform an online search for an ALA Girls State program, you are sure to find a world of information and activities that our programs put on during sessions and even throughout the year in preparation for their sessions.

Zoom meetings are now the norm, and they have proven to be an effective communication tool. Keynote speakers and presenters attended sessions via Zoom allowing for a broader field of speakers while also allowing audience participation.

ALA Hawaii Girls State welcomed a federal level keynote speaker, Rosie Rios, via Zoom. Ms. Rios served as the 43rd Treasurer for the United States of America. Her signature is on the United States paper currency. With a background of hard work and determination, her story is one of empowerment for all women.

Many states hosted Zoom meetings with staff in

preparation for their sessions. The ALA Girls Nation staff were able to meet monthly via Zoom in preparation for the July session. The staff commented that they felt better prepared for the session, and it offered a great opportunity to meet and work with other staff members and talk about promoting our programs.

While several programs -- (cheering from audience) -- while several programs conducted radio interviews and morning show interviews, Colorado was in the winner's circle when Department President Royce Hopper and Colorado Boys State Chairman Jay Bowen sat down with Fox 21 News for an in-studio interview about their programs. The news station tagged the session as a week that can shape a nation, or excuse me, a lifetime.

This year the ALA Girls National team eagerly awaited the arrival of two senators from the newly formed ALA Girls State program in the District of Columbia.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN DILLARD: The inaugural D.C. Girls State program was launched in June with the help of volunteers from all four active DC ALA units. Welcome to the ALA Girls State program District of Columbia.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN DILLARD: The ALA Girls Nation session was honored to incorporate President Vicki's focus by hosting the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival program. Senators learned about the program and how the arts are used as therapy for veterans and how the program is supported by the American Legion Auxiliary. They learned how they could help by advocating for legislation that pertains to therapy through the arts. They were treated to performances by these veterans and saw firsthand the talent they had to offer. It proved to be a turbo charged experience for all in attendance.

Payton Ward, senator from South Carolina, made this observation. "Each performer brought a different emotion to the surface. They were all incredible and inspiring, and they brought a new perspective to the needs of our veterans."

Madam President, as you can see the ALA Girls State and Girls Nation programs finished the race strong this year and are already gearing up to deliver our mission to next year's high school juniors.

Madam President, this concludes my platform remarks. However, may I introduce a special guest, please? Thank you. It gives me great pleasure to introduce the 2023 ALA Girls Nation President, Ms. Ysabella Olsen, President Olsen.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT OLSEN: Thank you, Madam National President and thank you, Ms. Donna. Good morning, everyone. My name is Ysabella Olsen, 2023 ALA Girls Nation President.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT OLSEN: The State of the Union is a message given to members of Congress and American citizens on the condition of the country. In our nation's history, there have been 99 in-person State of the Union addresses given by the sitting Presidents of the United States of America. Today marks the first, and in my case, only year that I will provide a State's of ALA Girls Nation address. So, you can consider this address the 100th in American history.

I am phenomenally proud to have been raised in Missouri since the age of 10-years-old. As a now alumni of ALA Girls State and ALA Girls Nation, it makes me emotional and forever grateful that the American Legion Auxiliary recognizes that young women need to be taught about government and empowered to know that a career in politics is possible.

The State of ALA Girls nation is strong because of countless hours ALA members put into fundraising, volunteering, and planning our life changing programs. Thank you. Thank you

for raising women, some of whom will be career politicians but foremost, young women who understand the importance of democracy and civic duty as Americans.

It has been an honor to represent this incredible program with my intelligent and incredibly well-spoken Vice President, Ashlyn Ross, of Alabama.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT OLSEN: I want to personally thank ALA Missouri Girls State staff, my Cronin City Girls, the incredible women of the ALA who put on the 2023 session of ALA Girls Nation and to my community of Georgetown.

During ALA Girls Nation, my absolute favorite event was Twilight Tattoo, a live military event featuring soldiers. A part of the show recognized Vietnam veterans and their families. My Grandpa Olsen and my da (phonetic), who just passed away last summer, both served in the Vietnam war. It was an honor to stand on their behalf, a moment I will never forget. I know that getting to learn about governmental processes attending ALA Girls Nation, and every single time I got to honor our colors at flag raising were moments I got to make them proud both on earth and in Heaven, and it meant everything to me.

I want to thank my mom, dad, and sister for supporting

me on this journey, and another thing I loved about ALA Girls Nation was that each pair of senators submitted a bipartisan bill to be debated in our mock senate sessions. I really loved getting to see the policy topics that this phenomenal group of young women deemed necessary to bring to our docket.

One highlight for me was many senators' passion for the change that needs to happen to preserve our earth for generations. Change, although uncomfortable, is inevitable; and we can take this opportunity for change to build resilient infrastructure and grow the renewable energy job industry. Climate change is not a story of fear and pain, but together we can turn it into a story of hope.

Climate was not the only topic discussed though. Girls Nation Senators passed bills on dam decommissioning, public education, and water conservation. These issues are not only to be solved in mock legislation but agenda items for our future. Amidst uncertainty, there's a hopeful nation of young women who are ready to tackle these problems with, among many things, American jobs, the environment, and equity in mind.

We worked during our week to make sure that our ALA Girls Nation government was productive. But don't worry, we got to appreciate our nation's beautiful capital, have fun, and most

importantly create lifelong friendships. I got to visit the Supreme Court, see my senator on the Senate Floor in the viewing gallery, and visit the incredible National Mall. These experiences have shaped my vision for the future, but the fact that I got to do it with young women from across the country is truly once in a lifetime.

For my first and last address to you, our chamber and citizens, alumni, supporters, friends of ALA Girls Nation, I want to focus on our future. A perfect near homonym for this moment is president versus precedent. A president is an elected head of a republic. A precedent is an earlier event that can be used as an example or guide for future events.

When I ran for President of ALA Girls Nation, I recognized I was campaigning for a position that no woman had ever held before in the United States government. There is no precedent for a female president. Then what does it mean that I'm a female president before the first female president? It means that I am establishing the precedent. I get to set the basis of my campaign on respect and bipartisanship. I get to say I am what a female president looks like.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT OLSEN: Because although I would have loved

to base my campaign and act by the inspiration of a former or current female president of the United States of America, it's never been done before. So, at ALA Girls Nation I got to choose how it was done. I had the opportunity as a woman to set the precedent so that I can be a prelude to the first female president.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT OLSEN: All summer, young women across our beautiful union set the model for women to take an active role in the United States government. ALA Girls State Citizens became mayors of their cities, some of whom may very likely live in towns that have never had a female mayor and one day maybe because of them, they will. I'm going to keep setting it for the girls and young women who will come after me and please, take a moment to look around you. These are the women who you set the example for and the women whom you set the -- these are the women who set the example for you and the women whom you set the example for. To strong women, no matter your identity or background, I urge you to set the precedent.

My name is Ysabella Olsen. I'm the 2023 American Legion Auxiliary Girls Nation President. With love from Missouri this concludes my State of ALA Girls Nation address.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Donna, thank you for your report on our premier program and, Ysabella, thank you so much for being here with us today. I'm so happy that our audience was able to meet you. Wasn't she awesome?

ALL: Yes.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: I think our futures in good hands, don't you? And we will one day have a woman president.

National Poppy Day recently gained media attention and I was privileged to be a part of a movement focused on bringing awareness to our veterans and remembering soldiers we have lost in battle. Here to tell us more about how the country embraced this day of awareness is Jeanne Haas, our National Poppy Chairman. Jeanne?

CHAIRMAN HAAS: The Department of Texas started their report with, "It's been an amazing poppy year," and I totally agree. The Poppy Committee as --

(Cheering.)

CHAIRMAN HAAS: -- units, districts, counties, and departments to promote, participate and provide. The Department of Minnesota wrote their Governor, who is a veteran, asking him

to proclaim May as Poppy Month and May 26th, 2023, as Poppy Day. Included were poppy program information and poppies for his staff and family.

The same information was sent to TV stations asking staff to wear poppies and to talk about to their viewers the significance of the poppy. Several departments used TV stations as a way to promote poppies. Poppy princesses across the country handed out poppies at American Legion Family functions, parades, visiting other organizations and community functions sharing the poppy story. Units asked for donations for the traditional red poppy, felt and crocheted poppies, poppy cookies, and poppy items.

The Department of Delaware created seashell poppy trinket holders for donations. Replicas of Flanders Fields were created in community parks to remind people of the significance of Memorial Day. The Department of New York helped units create QR codes for donations and the Department of Ohio set up online accounts for donations.

Units reported mailing out letters to members on the importance of the Poppy Day and the donations that are received along with two to four poppies for a member and a friend to share. Their donations increased greatly.

Both the Department of Illinois and Texas reported using paper plates with poppies attached to produce an honor wall. A group of seventh and eighth graders in Tennessee created a virtual presentation on the significance of the poppy and Flanders Field. The Department of California created a video on how to make a poppy, instructions for felt poppies and a poppy T-shirt.

A unit in West Virginia used their poppy posters to create a scavenger hunt. Winners completing the hunt received a poppy, a poppy bookmark, and a package of poppy seeds. The Department of Georgia, birthplace of the poppy lady, Moina Michael, promoted the poppy through school and community education along with the traditional Memorial Day poppy anchor lunch.

Many departments shared the poppy lady story with students, outreach programs and even at a town meeting. Fashion shows and poppy hat parades were fun ways to participate in our poppy program. An overseas poppy order came from Sergeant Major Perez for a German-American partnership event. Mailing issues caused these 400 poppies to arrive late for the May event, but the order will be used for future events. Thank you, Department of South Dakota, for your donation of these poppies and for the

mailing costs.

(Cheering.)

CHAIRMAN HAAS: As poppy funds were used to help veterans in times of need, the Department of Texas teamed up with the Armed Services YMCA of Harper Heights, Texas. Thanks to a memorandum of agreement between these two organizations they are pledging \$3,000 a month. At the time of this reporting this department had made donations for 20 months to help service members and their families with food shortages.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN HAAS: Part of the Department of Virginia's poppy donations support items for Operation SUDs, housing for homeless veterans and for (indiscernible) cards for the VA hospital. Members across the country excel with promotion, participation, and providing for the needs of our military veterans and their families with 46,745 reported hours in our poppy program.

Connecting with the visual image of the poppy with the sacrifice of service made by our veterans has been an important goal of the American Legion Auxiliary Poppy Program since its inception in 1921. Thanks, a big thanks to everyone who continues to help make this an iconic program of the American

Legion Auxiliary.

Madam President, this concludes my platform remarks but before I go, may I introduce the 2023 Little Miss Poppy?

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Please.

CHAIRMAN HAAS: Although many departments share the promotion of the poppy through their Little Miss Poppies, four junior members documented their participation of their promotion and wrote the two essays that are required. Each of these three, these junior members represented their American Legion Auxiliary while participating in community meetings, parades, and activities sharing the poppy story.

The 2023 Little Miss Poppy wrote in her essay, "The memorial poppy stands for those we have lost at war and the hope of a peaceful future."

It is my pleasure to present the 2023 Little Miss Poppy from the Department of Ohio, Ruth Hermiller.

MS. HERMILLER: Thank you for allowing me to your National Little Miss Poppy 2023. I feel honored to have help gained support for veterans and their families.

Thank you for allowing my family and I this chance to visit the beautiful city of Charlotte and to get out of school for a few days. Go Ohio.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: We're so blessed. Aren't we blessed? American Legion Auxiliary members made it a priority to protect, care for and support our children and youth, particularly those of veterans and military families. Let's get National Committee Chairman, Pam Ray, in the driver's seat so she can share all the wonderful ways our departments and units use their own creativity and generosity to engage our children and youth. Pam?

CHAIRMAN RAY: Madam President Vicki. As soon as the units and departments received your orders, "Ladies and gentlemen, start your engines," they took their practice laps to review their program and plan their strategy and received the green flag, and they became driven to carry out our mission for the children and youth of our country in traditional and unique ways.

Our Good Deed and Youth awards were given to youth throughout 42 departments. 390 Good Deed awards and 50 Youth Hero awards were given this past year.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN RAY: The reason for these awards ranged from a five-year-old in Massachusetts shoveling drives to a sixteen-

year-old in Pennsylvania distributing food for military share to veterans and their families. Good deeds for sure.

We have Youth Hero award recipients that were incredible. This is Mary Harvey Grady (phonetic). She's 13 years old. Mary received her Youth Hero award for saving a child from drowning. Mary is on the school swim team and teaches swimming as well. Congratulations to her and to all our other Youth Hero award winners.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN RAY: At one time or another we all need a buddy. The Department of Kentucky's Buddy Bench program -- there we go -- places benches at local churches, schools, visiting centers and parks to bring attention to bullying and the need for kindness and for friendship. It also teaches you the importance of recycling. It takes 1,600 pounds of plastic from bottle caps to make one bench. Not only has this been a great teaching moment, but it has also earned the West (phonetic) High School Family Career and Community Leaders of America Club a Good Deed award for spreading the word to other schools. Unit 138 in Kentucky, with the help of this club, placed 17 benches.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN RAY: For over 30 years Monterey Cyprus Unit 694 Department of California has hosted a Christmas party for their children and grandchildren of the American Legion Family. Also included on their guest list are the children of local Guard members and children of homeless veterans registered with the Veterans Transition Center in Marina, California.

This year 28 children signed up. There was frosting and decorating of cupcakes in holiday colors, simple holiday crafts, a pizza party, and, of course, candy. But the best part of the day was the arrival of Santa and Mrs. Claus. Each child received a candy cane, a wrapped toy, and a bicycle or tricycle.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN RAY: What a wonderful way to celebrate the holidays. This was a Legion Family effort with the bicycles being obtained through a Walmart grant by Squadron 694 Sons of the American Legion. The community also became involved providing monetary donations for the party. But the unit didn't stop there. A ham and gift cards were given to the National Guard and homeless VTC families to ensure they would have a happy holiday meal. Way to work our mission Monterey Cyprus Unit 694.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN RAY: The units in the Department of Texas were busy.

(Cheering.)

CHAIRMAN RAY: The Department President's theme was based on bears. Units around the state collected bears to be delivered to first responders. The bears are to be used for children during a time of crisis. Even National President Vicki got in on this project.

Department of Texas Chairman Kami Kemp and Texas members noticed the effects of the school shootings in Uvalde, Texas. With the help of members in her department, they worked to assemble over 200 emergency backpacks and child identification packets. A QR code was created to download the basic element to put packs together with over 150 downloads. These included emergency contact cards which could be clipped inside the backpack should the child be separated in a time of distress. DNA swabs for dental, fingerprint, and general identifying information cards for safekeeping should a child go missing or become injured. Great project, Kami.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN RAY: April -- yeah. April was the month of the military child and purple is the color and April 15th was

Purple Up! Day. What better way to gain support for this month than to get proclamation from your community or state government.

Elmer C. Jertberg, Unit 299 Department of California, got a community proclamation recognizing the month of April as the Month of the Military Child and April 15th as Purple UP! Day. Loganville, Georgia Unit 233 got their mayor's attention for a proclamation by making sure he was an active participant in Purple Up! Day. They gave him a purple tie. Great idea.

Rhode Island and South Carolina both got their state governments to proclaim April 15th as Purple Up! Day. They all wore purple for those ceremonies.

Past National President Kathy Daudistel has done a wonderful job representing the ALA on the Child Welfare Foundation. Through her dedication and communication with myself and vice Chairman, Robin Dorf, I am excited to report on this wonderful program on Kathy's behalf.

Units and departments found many ways to raise awareness and money for this foundation. Of course, many used the CWF pigs at different sites but one that caught my eye was the Department of Wyoming. A Recycle the Brand sale was held at their fall workshop. Slightly used branded clothing, jewelry

and other branded items were purchased with a donation to the CWF. What a great way to clean out your house, support our branding, and support a wonderful foundation at the same time.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN RAY: Between this fundraiser and their department total, Wyoming raised \$1,750 for CWF. Way to go Wyoming and thank you so much.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN RAY: Now, the Department of Indiana --

(Cheering.)

CHAIRMAN RAY: -- sold purple sunglasses all year long to raise money for CWF and it appears that not only the members in the entire American Legion Family, but also Santa and a very cute dog, got into Purple UP! Day as well. Indiana raised \$2,315 for CWF.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN RAY: National donation totals to the CWF for the time frame 6/1/22 through May 31st of '23 were as follows according to the American Legion Reports: Sons of the American Legion, \$424,760.55; The American Legion, \$163,864.01; our American Legion Auxiliary, \$62,267.16; individual donations of \$19,125.54; Eight & Forty \$8,469.06; bequests and other

donations \$777.12 totaling \$679,263.52.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN RAY: A total of 17 grants were awarded this year in the amount of \$797,251 from the previous year's fundraising efforts. One example of a grant was \$10,000 to Youth for Christ Military. This grant is, and I quote, "Investing in military connected youth through camp." The grant will provide scholarships for military children to attend camps.

Florida Atlantic University of Boca Raton, Florida was awarded \$6,561 for its project Pet Dogs, Resilience & Wellbeing in Military Adolescents. The grant seeks to study mental health in military adolescents who own and those who do not own a dog. Our own National Headquarters was awarded \$4,514 for the Star-Spangled Kids Education Initiative. These are just a few examples of many grants that were submitted and selected.

Well, we've crossed the finish line for this year. The 2022-2023 Children Youth program was a great success. So many of us say that children are our future. I believe that Nelson Mandela said it well. "Our children are the rock on which our future will be built, our greatest asset as a nation."

Madam President, this concludes my platform remarks but before I go, I'm more than happy to introduce at this time

the President of the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation,
Mr. Robert Morrill.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT MORRILL: Wow, what a good-looking bunch.
Madam President, distinguished guests and members of the
American Legion Auxiliary, good morning.

ALL: Good morning.

PRESIDENT MORRILL: It is my pleasure to be with you
today. When I was asked to take this position, they never told
me that I'd have the opportunity to speak to such a beautiful
group of ladies. I am truly honored.

I would first like to recognize past National
President, Kathy Daudistel, Chairman of the Child Welfare
Foundation Liaison Committee. Where's Kathy? Wherever you are.
I would also like to give a shout out to the great Department of
New York.

(Cheering.)

PRESIDENT MORRILL: Love you ladies, just love you.
What a great bunch of ladies. And finally, I would like to
thank the American Legion Auxiliary for all of the hard work
over the years. Not only for those in the audience today, but
also all the members back home that couldn't make the convention

today. You are a vital part of the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, but even more importantly the work that you do for veterans and their families across this nation is unmatched by any other group in our country, so thank you. Thank you very much.

I'm happy to report, well, you know what? Your Children and Youth Chairman just stole a lot of what I was going to say. She gave you, and that's okay. I don't have a problem with that. As a matter of fact, it'll make this speech a lot shorter. I was going to give you some numbers, and she already gave you those numbers, but the Board of Directors did approve \$797,251 over the last year for 17 grants for use of non-profit organizations; and I want to iterate that the Board approved all. Let me repeat all recommendations made by the Auxiliary Selection Committee.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT MORRILL: Yes. In the last decade the Auxiliary has supported an estimated \$3,626,412 in grants. Outstanding. Give yourselves a round of applause. I'm happy to report at the close of the 2022/2023 Child Welfare Program here, which ended on May 31st, the Foundation received a total of \$679,264 and the Auxiliary contributed \$62,300. Amazing.

As we celebrate our victories here today, we know that there's a lot of work that still must be done. We look forward to tomorrow's challenges and what we can accomplish. I ask that when you all head back home you take a minute to think about what you can do to make a bigger impact next year.

Consider putting Child Welfare Foundation piggybanks on your post tables, holding a monthly spaghetti dinner or pancake breakfast, or supporting the Child Welfare Foundation through 100 percent per capita banner program. Each dollar contributed doesn't just help a child, it also helps a nation of children.

2024 will mark the 70th anniversary of service to the youth of our nation through the Child Welfare Foundation. I hope it is a banner year, and I know all of you will help us reach that goal. Please take a moment to stop by the Children Youth Child Welfare booth in the Exhibition Hall today and learn what you can do to help our mission to raise money for the Foundation.

We have polo shirts in men's and women's sizes, newly designed baseball caps, and you can bundle the cap and a shirt and save some money, and they make good Christmas gifts. Newly designed lapel pins. I've got one on here. Please pick up one

of those and show your support for the Foundation, and we have new larger piggybanks. Last year we had small banks, and everybody wanted the bigger ones, so we've got them this year. They're only a dollar apiece. Stop by and pick up a few of them and bring them back to your posts and fill them up.

And now for the awards. The first award this morning is the U.S. ULY Grant Award awarded to the top department nationally based on combined total contributions of the American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, SAL Riders, and Eight & Forty during their contributing year. The winner of the ULY Grant Award is the Department of Florida.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT MORRILL: I didn't break that camera, did I? The next award is the Garland B. Murphy, Jr. award awarded to the most active department in the nation based on actual contributions received during the contribution year. This year the top department raised \$11,673 for the Child Welfare Foundation. The winning department is the Department of Florida.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT MORRILL: Next is our Excellence award awarded to the top department with the highest per capita

contributions average for the contribution year within each organization. This year's winner has a per capita average of \$2.02 per member. The winning department is the Department of Wyoming.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT MORRILL: And the last award we're going to present today is the Meritorious Achievement Award. This award is awarded to the top department in each organization that experienced the highest increase in per capita giving in the contribution year. This year the department raised its per capita giving by \$1.25 per member. The winning department is the Department of Wyoming again.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT MORRILL: Madam President, the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation Board of Directors would like to thank you for your support of the CWF for a wonderful year of service. It is now my honor and pleasure to present to you a five-diamond pin recognizing the 2022-2023 Child Welfare Foundation program here. Thank you for your service and steadfast support of the Child Welfare Foundation.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT MORRILL: Madam President, and members of

the Auxiliary, thank you for inviting me to be with you today. It has been an honor and a privilege to be here during your convention. I wish you all the best of success in the coming year and God bless you all.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT MORRILL: I forgot one thing. Stacey Kope, our administrator for the Child Welfare Foundation, she said not to introduce her, but I can't go without introducing. She's been such a big help. This is the first year I've had this job, and she's taught me a lot in the last year. Thank you, Stacey.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you, Robert, for that presentation. Very unexpected, and thank you, Pam, for your report.

Christopher Carlton was elected the National Commander of the Sons of the American Legion in Milwaukee, Wisconsin during their 50th National Convention. Chris is a 16-year member of Squadron 495 in my hometown state of Indiana. He is eligible through his father and grandfather and both of whom served in the United States Army. Commander Carlton's wife is a member of the American Legion Auxiliary and is a nurse at Roudebush VA Hospital in Indianapolis. Please welcome your Sons

of the American Legion National Commander and my good friend and little brother, Chris Carlton.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER CARLTON: Madam President, distinguished guests, national officers, and all the members of the American Legion Auxiliary, good morning.

ALL: Good morning.

COMMANDER CARLTON: I would like to thank you for a little bit of your time for allowing me to come and speak.

Madam President, do you see anything different?

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The hat.

COMMANDER CARLTON: That's right. The hat. Our convention is over, and I thought I'd go with a new color, so I went back to blue. Funny story about the hat in a way is that when my wife, Veronica, put it on, I was like I know my head didn't swell that bit over the past year. I literally sat down, and I looked at my old hat and it's seven-and-a-quarter, and I looked at this one and it said seven-and-a-quarter and I said, okay, it's just new.

Over the past year, we've had an awesome year. Us as the SAL, you as the Auxiliary, the American Legion. As an American Legion Family success across the board, totally. Your

President, let me tell you. She is the definition of what the American Legion Auxiliary is. Service, not self.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER CARLTON: Just to share one of the stories that I know is when we were in Germany, Ramstein, and we went to a little cookout that the American Legion Family was putting on for soldiers, and airmen, and people to come and just eat, you know, and have fun, well, there was a gentleman there who had three daughters, I believe it was three daughters, and he was kind of going through the line and Madam President jumped right up and started helping, helped fixing their plates, taking them over, sitting them down; and what she had found out though, that he wasn't alone. His wife had just got off work and was out in the car taking a nap. So, it was up to him. Him and his wife, apparently, she was still enlisted but he was a veteran himself and retired, and that's the things that I have seen Madam President do over the year is always be there quick, jump up, take charge, and help someone.

I know that she made sure that I was being taken care of and making sure that Veronica and I needed to get to where we needed to go. Always concerned with what we do, and I think that's what it takes to be a part of this American Legion

Family. Not looking out for one but looking out for all but looking out for your neighbor, your brother, your sister, and, for that, I thank you.

I won't take much more of your time, but I do want to leave you with two quotes, and you may have heard them along my travels, but the first one is, "People may forget what you say, people might forget what you do, but people will never forget how you made them feel," and I want to thank --

(Applause.)

COMMANDER CARLTON: -- I want to thank Madam President and all the Auxiliary for making me feel welcomed every time I came into a different department coming to your conference or convention, thank you. I hope I have made you feel the same when I'm there.

And the last one, and it's one that I've used for the last two-and-a-half years or so and it's about passion and purpose, "Purpose is why we journey, and passion is the flame that lights the way," and I challenge you throughout this next year that you don't lose your passion, and you remember what your purpose is. It's our veterans, the children of our veterans, the children of our country, and this country.

I wish you all good luck with your convention. I hope

it's good, and I look forward to your next President, and with that, I thank you.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Joining me next is the National Commander, Vincent "Jim" Troiola, the leader of the nation's largest veteran's organization.

In 1968, Jim joined the United States Navy where he served onboard the USS Nitro with an honorable discharge in 1974. He credits his success in the American Legion to his wife of 48 years, Saveria, his two daughters, and of course his Department of New York post family who mentored and sponsored him. He was elected National Commander of the American Legion during the organization's 103rd National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Please welcome our National Commander and my good friend, the older brother and taller brother, Vincent "Jim" Troiola.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER TROIOLA: Good morning.

ALL: Good morning.

COMMANDER TROIOLA: Madam President and American Legion Auxiliary members, good morning once again.

ALL: Good morning.

COMMANDER TROIOLA: There was a man up here on the stage before me, before I got on, that I want to introduce to you because Madam President will probably say something about him as well. Where'd he go? There he is. Come on up here, Gary.

You know, when you become a National Commander, you get to choose an aide and most of you will probably see the aide loading luggage in a car or maybe you see them handing me water, whatever it is. But that's not why I chose him. I chose him because he's a 27-year retired E7 chief petty officer. He's a past department commander from the Department of New York in our 100th anniversary, and I believe that when you get an aide, you need somebody following you that can give you a lot of advice and you can --

(Cheering.)

COMMANDER TROIOLA: I guess New York is over there. But anyway, Gary has proved this year that I can bounce ideas off him, we can bounce ideas off each other and make it more successful. So please meet Gary Schacher.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER TROIOLA: And Gary -- wow -- and Gary is the

aide of aides I call him because, if the American Legion Family leadership is together, Chris and Madam President, if we're all together, he becomes the aide for them too, also. Am I right, Madam President? So, he helps everybody. He's a great guy.

You know, I wanted to talk to you about some of the accomplishments we've made this year between "Be the One" and the new base program we have with the active-duty military. The "Be the One" program has really resonated so well all throughout the American Legion Family and we visit posts all over the world and all over the United States and see how well the family works together trying to save veterans lives every day.

You know, when I first started this back in my campaign years, I would go out to a Legion post and I would talk to members and I'd speak about the "Be the One" and the need to become a community center where veterans could come at risk and trust the people that they're talking to and get the help that they need, and it's just amazing how every single member of that American Legion Family, you know, from the post and the squadron and the unit and the chapter, it's just amazing how well they work together to try and identify, number one, the veterans at risk and that I'm very proud of, so thank you very much.

But the part about "Be the One" as it resonated, we

had the racecar, everybody knows about the racecar. Alex Palou came in seventh place yesterday so he's still in a points championship, and every time his name comes into the top ten, that gives us more exposure as a family and that's what happens. If you listen to the NBC commentators when that race is on TV, they don't talk about the No. 10 car. They don't talk about the Chip Ganassi car, the fact that it's a Honda, they say it's the American Legion car every single time and that's great for us.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER TROIOLA: So, then we go to the, you've all heard of the system worth saving where we go to Veterans hospitals, and we visit them and see if we can figure out anything that's wrong and see if we can advocate on their behalf? Well, now we have a base program. Base assessment, service member, experience is what it means.

So, we're going to be going to bases all over the world, all over the United States. As a matter of fact, the first one is coming up in October in Yuma, Arizona, and we are going to go into the base, hold a town hall meeting with the troops that are there, the commanders, and we're going to find out what's wrong with quality of life.

Quality of life is a big issue right now in the

military. Some of it is funding, some of it is housing-related, some of it is education-related, childcare-related. We're suffering, and they're suffering and, you know, I don't know if anybody popped into our national security meeting a couple of days ago, we had senior enlisted leadership there up to the first sergeant major of the Marine Corp. We had the Air Force there, the Army, the Navy, the Coast Guard, and the National Guard; and they're reaching out to us for advocacy.

The Marine Corps is \$18 billion shy of coming up with quality of life for their members and their families. We're going to help them get that money. We're going to go to Congress along with their legislative division. We're going to work together, and we're going to get them that money.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER TROIOLA: So, the biggest part of my year was I purposely chose small posts in rural communities because I felt that having a national officer walk into a post and recognize what they do is so important for us, and it should be important to you, also, because I told you they work so well as a family unit. The difference between the king-sized posts and the little post in rural communities is the king-sized posts do a wonderful job; and when they advertise an event, they're going

to do at their post, the community comes out and they support it. But the small posts in the small rural areas are the community.

So, you visit a post, I'm in Wyoming a couple of years ago, I walk into this post. It's got 23 members. I thought, wow, the post is giant. Can't believe it, 23 members. Take me to the backyard, there must be 50 gigantic barbecues back there. I said what in the heck are you doing with this? He goes, Commander, when we have a barbecue, we have a barbecue. He says the whole community comes down and they help us, they don't help them, they just cook and the whole community comes and gets involved. That's the difference. So, the newspaper articles, unprecedented visit from a National Commander, first time in 104 years. How's that?

(Applause.)

COMMANDER TROIOLA: So, what we like to say is in the American Legion is 50 and 60 percent of all other Legion posts are small posts in small rural areas and that's where the rubber hits the road, the blue cap. To me this means nothing. It's all about what the blue cap is and the same thing with the Auxiliary, same thing with the SAL. It's the heartbeat of America as far as the American Legion goes.

So, keep visiting them small posts. Keep giving them recognition. As a matter of fact, a couple of states had gone out and say, you know, if you're going to have 15 members in a post, we're going to merge them. Really study them before you do that. We went to a post that had eight members, and I said to them, "what do you do for the community?" and the Commander said nothing. He said nothing, and we're talking, and he goes as soon as you leave, he says we've got to get ready for the Memorial Day parade. I said I thought you said you did nothing. Well, we couldn't do anything, and then he realized they were doing something, and then they said they sent four boys to Boys State, and they sent two girls to Girls State. It's unbelievable, eight people. How's that?

(Applause.)

COMMANDER TROIOLA: So anyway, Madam President, I thank you so much for a wonderful year and a wonderful partnership. You did such a wonderful job. Thank you so much.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you so much.

COMMANDER TROIOLA: Thank you.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

COMMANDER TROIOLA: Thank you.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: He is tall, isn't he?

(Applause.)

(Laughter.)

COMMANDER TROIOLA: I'm a bit of a goofball, too.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you so much. Thank you.

COMMANDER TROIOLA: God bless all of you.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: When I first met him, he was, -- I thought, really quiet, but I learned different later on when I got to know him because that's what he does sometimes.

From our grassroots members to our national leaders, none of us take a back seat when it comes to working the Americanism program. Here to tell us more about how our members across the nation worked hand-in-hand to promote the Americanism program is National Chairman, Michele DeGennaro. Michele?

CHAIRMAN DEGENNARO: Members were revved up for Americanism this year as departments and units promoted patriotism and good citizenship throughout our great nation.

Participating in flag etiquette and proper disposal ceremonies to observing patriotic holidays within the communities, Auxiliary members showed their true spirit and colors for the red, white, and blue.

The year began and the race was on to get into the schools as units and members promoted the Americanism essay

contest with this year's theme "What Does Patriotism Mean to you?" Unit 215 in the Department of Virginia held an Americanism essay contest event hosting over 90 guests, including the school superintendent, teachers, and families of the essay contestants. Attendees came to hear about the Legion Family Americanism program and the essays of the 15 winners. This unit's motto is "A unit doesn't have to be big to make a big impact." Way to go Unit 215 from Virginia.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN DEGENNARO: Auxiliary members pushed the pedal to the metal as they participated in the American Legion Americanism programs assisting as timekeepers, escorts, judges, and mentors. Whatever the need, the Auxiliary members were ready to heed the call as they volunteered on local, state, and national oratorical contests.

Let's not forget Legion baseball too. As we change gears, units promoted flag etiquette. Redlands Unit 106 in California showed proper respect for our flag when they held a flag disposal ceremony. Army Honor Guard specialists from March Air Reserve Base opened the ceremony and presented the colors. Local JROTC, Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, and Brownie troops were also in attendance to learn and assist with the flag disposal.

Over 800 flags were properly disposed of that night including a garrison flag, one of the largest sized flags flown on national holidays and special occasions. The Department of New York also held a flag disposal ceremony teaching their ALA Empire Girls leaders proper flag etiquette.

Unit 233 in Palm Valley, Florida used our country's flag comic book to help teach junior Auxiliary members the history, meaning, and proper treatment of the United States flag. Speaking of our country's flag comic book, Unit 255 in Minnesota distributed 547 copies to all the local elementary schools. Word has it they plan on continuing this next year and providing books to all third-grade classes.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN GENNARO: On Veterans Day, Unit 26 in Mississippi assisted by the local JROTC and other veterans' organizations placed over 700 flags in front of their Post home and around the community to honor all those who served.

Kentucky Unit 203 in Latonia held a flag folding ceremony at a local nursing home while explaining each of the 13 folds.

Moving into the final stretch after a devastating hurricane in southwest Florida destroying four Post homes and leaving a path of destruction in its wake, Legion Family members

and entire communities came together. It was in this community's darkest hours that patriotism fueled their fire and gave them hope. As a display of unity and camaraderie, our American flag proudly waved where nothing else remained.

As we move on to the victory lap, there's so many great things our Auxiliary has done to show their Americanism. You should all be very proud as we continue to honor all who served every day.

I thank you for allowing me to serve as your Americanism Chairman. It has been my honor and privilege. Madam President, this concludes my platform remarks. Thank you.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you, Michele. Our units and departments continue to be mission driven and working on our education program. To share with us their great accomplishments, please welcome National Education Chairman, Sallie Rossman. Sallie?

CHAIRMAN ROSSMAN: Madam President. Nelson Mandela said education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world. The American Legion Auxiliary trusts that providing, promoting, and encouraging are key elements to improving education for our future leaders who can make positive changes

to our country.

This year our members have proven that education plus auxiliary equals success, crossing the winner's line fueled by service, not self. Units took numerous avenues for "Give 10 to Education" to provide students and teachers with the necessary learning materials. The Auxiliary and Legion Family members provided hundreds of backpacks, school supplies, and personal needs with cards of encouragements to children, teachers, and families of all departments, especially those devastated.

The Department of California initiated a challenge to see which unit could donate the most items to the schools and in contrast, the Department of Maryland challenged all units to provide supplies to schools in their community, and all units in that department showed what they could do for service, not self.

The Department of Vermont's "Give 10 to Education" ensured warm students learn better with their Winter Warmth project. Their members and friends made mittens, hats, and scarfs, which they delivered to the schools for the students. Students, teachers, and schools across our country received donations to assist in making this year a success, especially for the military children.

Auxiliary units recognized that a school takes all

puzzle pieces to function correctly. These puzzle pieces include the teachers, support staff, administrators, bus drivers, and other school division personnel, all acknowledged during American Education week which began in 1921 with a co-sponsoring of the NEA and the American Legion, and also Teachers Appreciation Week.

Teachers Appreciation Week was creatively demonstrated by the Unit's unique decorated snacks such as "You're Awesome to the Core" and Just Popping to Say Thank You," and the gifts included teacher fuel tumblers and teacher survival packages. In addition, the members volunteered in the schools to allow staff free time.

Promoting the "Veterans in Community School" programs allowed American history to come alive and ensure students acknowledged our military heroes' service and sacrifice and there's no one better to tell that story than our veterans who had a significant part in shaping it.

During one program a veteran spoke on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the difference between Veterans Day and Memorial Day, while another veteran presented the "For Which It Stands" video and showed the students how to identify the veteran grave markers, after which the class placed flags and

flowers at over 700 graves.

This program gives our veterans the opportunity to share their experiences with students, which goes a long way towards helping to keep their memories and our history alive. All levels of our organization encourage Auxiliary scholarships to provide educational opportunities to both traditional and non-traditional students. Units encourage veterans to return to school to further either education or assist in completing the paperwork. Members reached out especially to veterans and active-duty families for them to apply for Auxiliary scholarships, and we set a record with 864 children a four-year National President Scholarship application.

(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN ROSSMAN: The American Legion Auxiliary Junior Member Loyalty scholarship assists our members and serves as a branch between our junior and senior members. The American Legion Auxiliary believes that the more knowledge our young people gain, the better citizens they will become. That is why our organization is committed to education. Investing in education is investing in our country's future.

Yes, education plus auxiliary equals success for everyone, and Madam President, this concludes my platform

remarks.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you, Sallie. We are closing today's session with a very special guest. So, before I bring him out on stage, our National Secretary will share some updates. Coral?

SECRETARY GROUT: Thank you, Madam President. First of all, all unit members of the year need to report backstage tomorrow morning at 7:30 a.m., for a special group picture.

The 2023/2024 Department Presidents will meet with the Installation Committee at 12:15 this afternoon.

Don't forget to visit the Wall of Heroes conveniently open before and after each session. So don't delay, donate today.

And finally, it's time to place Your bids at the ALA Foundation's silent auction. All items are online now and will be available to view at the State's dinner. Bidding will close on Wednesday.

I have two notes. The Department of Alabama Department Secretary has two tickets to the luncheon tomorrow. If you don't have a luncheon ticket tomorrow, you can't participate in the raffle for the PUFL membership. Better be

there.

And the 2023-2024 Children and Youth Committee will meet at 1:30 p.m., this afternoon in the American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters office conference room.

Madam President, that concludes the updates, and we're ready for our special guest.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you, Coral. As many of your know POW/MIA awareness has been my heart's passion project for a very long time.

During my leadership orientation the summer before I took office, I met with American Legion National Security Director Mario Marquez who had heard about my passion and wanted to tell me about Team Long Road, a group of fellow Marines who were hiking across the United States to bring awareness to prisoners of war and missing in action.

I think I stopped in mid-sentence because right away I knew that I had to meet these veterans. No matter where I had to go or what I had to do, they need to be part of my story. It turned out all it took was months of careful logistic planning, four plane rides and hiking in the freezing Oregon weather. Honestly, a small price to pay in order to share some time with these extraordinary veterans.

Team Long Road is so special to me I could talk about them for days. But I think I know someone who can do a much better job. Please welcome to the stage our 2023 Public Spirit Award winner U.S. Marine Corp veteran Justin "J.D." LeHew of Team Long Road.

COMMANDER LEHEW: How about another round of applause for your International President, Ms. Vicki

That was a pretty genuine hug. Please do not mistake my lack of notes for any lack of preparation this evening because a lot of the things that I do, whether it is walking across a nation, whether it is travelling around the world as part of a great organization called History flight. That being the chief operating officer, I get the luxury after spending 31 years in the U.S. Marine Corp of travelling all over the world to locate and return those who could not be located and returned, and also outside of being a marine, outside of being a husband, father, my wife is bashfully behind that curtain that is over there, and as a young marine, I found out that marines don't go anywhere in life without a navy corpsman.

So about 25 years ago I searched across the deck plates of the Navy, got the best ~~one~~ looking one that I could and got her to marry me, and she has kept me patched up this

entire way and also allows me to get out and do some of the things that we are taking about today.

Being in front of the American Legion Auxiliary is one of the greatest honors of my life and walking quite a few miles with you, and as you could see from the cold and the coats, and everything else, we crossed 3,365 miles across America's longest highway, which is U.S. Route 20, which starts in Boston Harbor and ends in Newport, Oregon unless you're from Oregon, then it starts in Oregon and ends in Boston. Uh-huh.

It crosses 12 states, 12 of the most beautiful states of our 50 states in the Union along with probably some of the most beautiful people that you will not see on the news because they are out there making America the America that we have always known America to be, and you will find if you step away from the television sets and from the internet, you will find that that statement resonates with a lot of people.

Ray and Rocky, I wish they were here, but surprise, I'm going to fly Ray and Rocky in a—in a couple of days, and they are preparing for another walk. Ray, Rocky and I are going to start this Sunday in Bedford, Virginia at the National D Day Memorial. My father was an infantryman in the 29th Infantry across Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944, and we also know in Virginia

we have the 29th Infantry Division Highway.

My father passed away when I was 13. I really wish he probably could have been around to give young Lance Corporal, Corporal Sergeant, Staff Sergeant, Gunnery Sergeant Major Lehw a lot of that three-war advice. But I didn't get to have any of that. But I grew up with neighbors who gave me all of that advice. I grew up with coaches that gave me that advice. I grew up with the great teachers across America that gave me that advice, and it inspired me to follow in those footsteps; and we chose Route 20 because it is not the shortest highway across America. It is the longest highway across America, and Route 20 is significant as well because when they kind of came up with the idea, it had been 20 years and we had been fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan and that was also an homage to this generation that has fought along these wars in American history walked by the veterans who fought those wars carrying 40 pound packs for over 3,000 miles, because those packs represented the burden that the U.S. military has carried since 1775 to keep our nation exactly what it is today; and we wanted pain, and we wanted sacrifice because there are over 80,000 POWs and MIAs who have not made it back to U.S. soil.

So, what inspired that? One day in Fredericksburg,

Virginia, I live in a very beautiful town in America, very historic. I get to walk downtown, and I get to see that black POW/MIA flag flying underneath the American flag at the post office, and you'll notice in all of your post offices around the nation the same exact flag, and somebody created that flag years ago and it meant so much to this nation that that flag is the only flag that is authorized to fly underneath the U.S. colors in every 50 states and a protectorate around the world. It was that important, and it is still that important.

However, I saw the black flag that day a little bit tattered. Now I bet there's a lot of you in here that has seen the American flags tattered and torn and people will walk up, and they will ask somebody can you please replace the American flag. I found out that not a lot of people go up and ask to replace that black and white flag, and I'd also found out that not a lot of people knew exactly why that black and white flag even flies underneath our national colors.

But I will tell you this. Every mother in America that has sent their sons and daughters to war knows what that flag is about and they want their children home and they want that empty grave to be full, just like their hearts, and it mattered so much in the 1970s that families of Vietnam lobbied

so much to get that flag, and when I walked in there and asked them to replace that she had said, a very beautiful and nice lady, she had said that they didn't have a replacement for it but that they had ordered one and I said I have one if you would like to have that, and she said we'd like to go through the process it's going to need here, and as I was going to reiterate again, she then turned and she asked me, and I told Vicki she said why does that matter so much to you? And I had a nice little conversation and in about three minutes she was in tears, and she had said now it matters that much to me and we will get that replaced right away. Because she was unaware of the sacrifices that that flag really did represent, even though they drive by, and they see it every single day.

And when I made her feel that flag, and she grew up around there, and she knew what the blue stars are, and I told her when you see in windows blue stars turn to gold stars and what that absolutely means from Gold Star Families, she remembered. And we were just coming out of a national pandemic at that time, and I was running a worldwide search and recovery organization, and to do that you have to go worldwide.

So, our momentum stopped, ladies and gentlemen, and I figured maybe I could do some good by not driving across America

because a lot of people do that. Some people ride bicycles across America. No one hardly ever walks across America, and it took six-and-a-half months. That's a deployment from my family again. So it (indiscernible) matter when you're missing that family and that time, just like our forward deployed troops today that are missing that family, just like everybody that is sitting in here and their lives that have missed that family, it bonds us who we are as Americans, and I will tell you walking across 12 of the greatest states in the Union, you will find that Americans are more similar than anybody is telling you that they are different in this nation, and those states are all intersecting with each other have their own differences. But they are united just like they have ever been united before.

And I started walking through the Berkshires -- so if you're from -- Massachusetts in here? People lied to me. Massachusetts ain't flat, right, and when you get to the Berkshires, you talk to the locals because the locals will tell you when the next hill is going to come and how much that's going to hurt.

And then you get into New York and the hills never stop because there's always a hill right behind the next hill, and then you're starting to get into June and July which are

what?

ALL: Hot.

COMMANDER LEHEW: Very hot months, right? You're talking three individual marines that have three decades between them. A sergeant major that's 52, another sergeant Major that's about 44, and then a staff sergeant who joined us in Elgin, Illinois. As I walked out of a hotel one morning for me and Rocky to walk and saw a young man sitting on a bench that looked very familiar to me with a large pack and his name was Raymond Shinohara.

Raymond Shinohara, when I was his regimental sergeant major, we had the honor of interring the last living United States Marine from the blast on the U.S. Arizona on 7 December 1941, and Raymond Shinohara was the one that carried the urn to the divers so the Marine could be put back in with his ship mates. That matters, and it mattered so much to Ray watching Rocky and I walk, that he hopped a plane from Guam with a full pack, and when I saw him that morning, I said, "Hi Ray, what are you doing here? He said, "I'd like to walk with you," and I said, "How far?" and he said, "The rest of the way." That was over 1,600 miles left at that point, and Vicki got to walk with all three of us by the time that we crossed the border over

there and it was amazing.

If there's anybody in here from the Post in Attica, New York, that post gave me the first beer on Route 20. We had walked 19 miles that day. I had no shortage of people that were giving water and Gatorade, sometimes you just need something a little different on the side of the road, and they looked at me and they said "You look like you could use a little bit more than this, would you like to come down and see our post?" And at that time, we hadn't been able to do that because when you're walking and you don't have support vehicles and that with you, you walking two miles off the road to go down to a post is not there, so they gave us a ride.

And we walked inside of there and, like you had heard your National Commander for the American Legion say about small posts, that's one of the most beautiful posts I've ever seen and there was about eight people sitting around that bar and those eight people donated \$1,500 around that bar --

(Applause.)

COMMANDER LEHEW: -- to return America's missing in action. Not only, but then the bartender put us in a truck and took us to give us a tour of Attica Prison. That's the hospitality that you would get, and then you walk. I found out

that there was wine country in New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, and then you get to Indiana, Angola.

(Cheering.)

COMMANDER LEHEW: There was a man over there named Alex Dobson, and Alex Dobson, lives in Angola, Indiana, and I served together in the Marines. More importantly, your post commander drove over 100 miles over a week's time frame to run supplies to us all the way across Indiana, whether it was water, Gatorade, chow, it did not matter.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER LEHEW: Galena, Illinois. One of the most beautiful towns in America. Dubuque, Iowa, are you in here?

(Cheering.)

COMMANDER LEHEW: That's the tallest hill we had to climb across the United States. It took all three of us to push each other up a little hill that night to get to the flat part of Iowa and get to some of the most beautiful people you've ever seen. Iowa nice is a real thing.

(Cheering.)

COMMANDER LEHEW: And I will close across with one of the best sites that I have saw, and we were really hurting, and I think I regaled your President with this as well. We were

tired one night in Nebraska --

(Cheering.)

COMMANDER LEHEW: -- and we were leaning up again, we had walked -- it was well over 30 some miles that day -- we were leaning up against a building at about 2200 at night, and Rocky and I looked over and we saw a vehicle pull up into a parking lot. There should not be a vehicle pulling into that parking lot, and then we saw the lights turn out, and then we saw a vehicle across the street turn the lights out, and we thought this is either a drug deal or something nefarious is going on here. And we just got to watch one of the greatest things that represents all that is still right and good about America today.

Out of that car, when those two vehicles met, the opposite side of the road was a big grain truck that night, and a lady hopped out with a bassinet with a baby from this vehicle with a bunch of girls. Out of the truck cab pulled up next to that was dad, and she was bringing the girls out to see her dad at 2200 at night because dad's working the fields that night.

And crawling out of the back of that truck that's been riding around with dad all day was the boys in that family, and they were getting transferred back to mom because they all need to go to school the following morning, and that taught me, and

reinforced again exactly what America is. It is not polarization. It is the hard-working families that are out there that has been keeping the stitches of the fabric tight on this flag since 1775 that no enemy is ever going to tear at that flag as long as we are creating people like that.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER LEHEW: And if Dan Burkes is out here from when we crossed the Oregon border, there was a Mustang that pulled up, a Mustang that pulled up, and down the side of this Mustang it said American Legion. Not some little tag this big, I mean printed all the way down this thing. All the way across Oregon if I needed anything, all he said was you just call me. And the best thing I will remember from Dan saying this, and he goes, "It has nothing to do with you being the National President of the Legion of Valor, 31 years as a sergeant major. It doesn't matter if you're a general, it doesn't matter if you're a private, we would do this for any veteran that came across here --

(Applause.)

COMMANDER LEHEW: -- and that reinforces the goodness of these organizations, the Auxiliary, and the Legion exactly for what they are.

So why does that mission matter? I will leave you with this. What is the inspiration that makes people spend hundreds of thousands of dollars of earned money to do this? We are the world's most successful private MIA search and recovery company founded by Mark Noah quite a few years ago, 389 recoveries. 161 of those have been positively identified and returned to their families. And the other ones? They're waiting for the puzzle piece from you. They are waiting for the DNA. They are waiting for a generational line to find. They are waiting for material evidence that fixes the piece of the puzzle that allows another one of our great friends to come home, and why does that matter? Because when you come through the archives of America, as I did as an historian, and you find things like from General Hap Arnold, and a lot of you know who General Hap Arnold is, and a lot of the enemies of our nation will never forget who Hap Arnold was, and the 8th Air Force and everybody else.

"Dear General Arnold, we appreciate your kind words and sympathy, also the nice things you say about our son, Lieutenant M.G. Rogers (phonetic), and I would appreciate it so much if you would tell me what evidence you have that my boy died that day. I hear there were 26 officers and crew on five

of those planes. I also heard they were just ten minutes out of New Caledonia when last heard, and they had four-and-a-half hours of gasoline left.

I feel that our government must have searched for them, but please tell me if you have any evidence that proves that they perished and if they did, you should tell us.

Every branch of the service has been very kind to us. His six months gratuity pay is coming, and the insurance papers have been taken care of, but the thing I want to know most is where is my boy, General?"

There are hundreds of thousands of letters just like that during the 1940s, '50s, '60s, and '70s from American mothers wanting to know where their sons are at, and they wanted them back.

So, imagine the heartache, and this is what I want you to take and teach our children why this matters. Why is that flag still a flag that is right and good for our nation today and it is not polarized. It's not Republican, it's not Democrat, everybody can get behind that flag regardless of race, creed, color origin, it does not matter.

So, when your National President made that whole focus that was up here, that was a positive step in the right

direction, to reinvigorate what that flag matters and means to America. Because when you're in the National Archives, that's not the most heartbreaking thing.

I have 541 Marines that died on an island in Tarawa on 20 November of 1943; 541 were left out there. Their families received telegrams that their sons were not coming home on Christmas Eve of 1943.

If you are from Waterloo, Iowa here, the Solomons (phonetic) received five telegrams on one day telling Mrs. Solomon all of your sons are gone. This is who we are as Americans. That's still not the most painful one.

1946 they send you a telegram that says not only is your son gone, we can't find him. 1949, thousands of telegrams went to families across a nation, not only is your son dead, not only can we not find him, the most heartbreaking thing I think I've ever read in my life, the telegrams that went to those families that said we've now stopped looking for them. And that is why we will never stop looking for them. The demand signal is too great to do that, and the children of this nation need to understand why that matters so much. Not to this generation and the disconnect, to every generation in America.

So, thank you, Madam President, from the bottom of my

heart for making this a focus and what everybody in here can actually do is gather your powers like you heard your National American Legion Chairman, lobby your leaders. Give them more money for the U.S. Department of Defense and the Defense POW/MIA Agency to actually go out into the world to make a concerted effort to do that. And also, get to know your neighbors, get to know the people who have made us all free and the sacrifices that those families have made can never be forgotten.

From Rocky, Ray, me, my family, everybody here, Nicky (phonetic), all of you, I love you all to death. This is still the greatest country in the world and it ain't going to be anything else other than that on my watch, I can sure tell you that.

So, God bless. Semper Fidelis. Thank you.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Okay. I'm going to go off script just a little bit. J.D. may kill me for this. I want to tell just a little story, and I have told it in some of the departments, but J.D. has not heard it.

When the two National Commanders and I visited DPAA in Hawaii, we got to this room. It was all glassed in with tables of partial remains. The tables I noticed were sitting a little

different than I thought they would have been because I would have thought they would have been squared off, but they were kind of sitting like this. In the back of that room -- I've got to get through this -- the back of that room was American flags. Not one, but the whole back of the room and the scientists said to me, of course I'm going to cry, the scientists said to me if at any given time that person sat up on that table, they would always see an American flag.

Well, of course I cried. But, you know, this is the thing that J.D. and his crew do. They bring those remains back and they return them to those family members, and I just think that's so important that he continues to do this daily. This is what his life is all about and that is why it's so important that him and his team, Team Long Road, are the ones that got the Spirit Award because you're just phenomenal. Okay. That's my story. That's unscripted.

DEPT. OF RHODE ISLAND: Madam President? Madam President, microphone 3.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Microphone 3. Yes.

DEPT. OF RHODE ISLAND: Yes. Hi. The Department of Rhode Island would like to start a challenge with the first \$100 donation to Team Long Road.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you very much. We will take that over there. One of the pages will get it from you. I think we've heard a challenge here. That's awesome. Wasn't expecting that.

Do we have -- okay, okay. In the meantime, J.D., thank you so much for being here today with us and for accepting the 2023 Public Spirit Award on behalf of Team Long Road. I do wish Rocky and Ray could have been here. They were phenomenal.

We are all so inspired by the passion you have for our POW and MIAs. We are so grateful for your work that I have one more special surprise. On behalf of all the members gathered here at our National Convention, we would like to present Team Long Road with this check for \$750.

COMMANDER LEHEW: Thank you.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: J.D. has agreed to stay after lunch for a Q&A session. It is first come/first served. You should have gotten information about that. You don't need to register. It will begin at 1:30 in room West 209F as in Frank. Please join us there for a special opportunity that'll give you a chance to ask any questions that you may have for J.D. and I'm

sure he would love for any of you to come and talk to him, and then if there's any other challenges out there, I'm sure that that would be a good time to present those.

MS. SKANKS: Madam President?

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Yes.

MS. SKANKS: Mike 3.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Yes.

MS. SKANKS: Michelle Skanks from Berkley, Massachusetts.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Go ahead.

MS. SKANKS: I'm meeting the challenge and raising it a hundred. \$200, please.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

DEPT. OF MISSISSIPPI: Microphone 4, please.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Yes. Microphone 3.

DEPT. OF MISSISSIPPI: Madam President. The Department of Mississippi would like to donate \$140 to Team Long Road.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Awesome. Just hold this -- hold this money and we'll get that collected from you. Just hold on to --

DEPT. OF OHIO: Microphone 4, please.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Oh, my God.

DEPT. OF OHIO: She's allergic to me.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Sorry. Tell that (indiscernible).

DEPT. OF OHIO: Microphone 4.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Microphone 4.

DEPT. OF OHIO: Department of Ohio, over \$400.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Awesome, awesome.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Oh, wait.

DEPT. OF TENNESSEE: Madam President?

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Yes.

DEPT. OF TENNESSEE: Microphone. Microphone 2.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Microphone 2.

DEPT. OF TENNESSEE: Department of Tennessee would also like to donate \$100.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. This is so unexpected but wonderful.

DEPT. OF COLORADO: Madam President, microphone 4.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Microphone 4.

DEPT. OF COLORADO: The Department of Colorado has \$220.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

DEPT. OF TEXAS: Madam President?

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Yes.

DEPT. OF TEXAS: Microphone 2. Texas

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PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Microphone 2.

DEPT. OF TEXAS: Texas donates \$1,000.

(Applause.)

DEPT. OF MINNESOTA: Microphone 4.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Microphone 4.

DEPT. OF MINNESOTA: Minnesota has 480.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you, 480.

DEPT. OF NEVADA: Mike 1.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Microphone 1. I'm not for sure
where you're at.

DEPT. OF NEVADA: Mike 1's over here.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: There you go.

DEPT. OF NEVADA: Department of Nevada, \$150.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

DEPT. OF ARIZONA: Microphone 3.

PRPRESIDENT KOUTZ: Microphone 3.

DEPT. OF ARIZONA: Department of Arizona, \$370.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. Department --

DEPT. OF DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA: Madam President?

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Department --

DEPT. OF DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA: Department No. 2, oh,
sorry. Sorry.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: That's fine. You're fine.

DEPT. OF DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA: Microphone No. 2.

The District of Columbia donates \$100.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

DEPT. OF MONTANA: Microphone No. 4. The Department
of Montana donates \$160.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

DEPT. OF UTAH: Microphone 1.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Microphone 1.

DEPT. OF UTAH: Department of Utah donates \$220.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Microphone 2.

DEPT. OF VERMONT: Microphone 2. The Department of
Vermont \$215.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. Microphone 4.

DEPT. OF ALABAMA: Department of Alabama \$290.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

DEPT. OF ARKANSAS: Microphone 2. The Department of

Arkansas gives \$100.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

DEPT. OF OREGON: Microphone 4.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Microphone 4.

DEPT. OF OREGON: Department of Oregon would like to donate \$400.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

DEPT. OF ILLINOIS: Microphone 1. Department of Illinois \$500.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

DEPT. OF SOUTH DAKOTA: Madam President, microphone 4.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Microphone 4.

DEPT. OF SOUTH DAKOTA: Department of South Dakota \$245.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

DEPT. OF MAINE: Microphone 1.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Microphone 1.

DEPT. OF MAINE: Department of Maine \$270.

DEPT. OF GEORGIA: Microphone 2. Department of Georgia \$410.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. I'm going to take just a short break. I want to introduce someone else here that's

responsible for making this all happen, and I can't say enough about this guy. Mario Marquez is the National Security Director in the D.C. Office for the American Legion, and if it wasn't for Mario, I would have never met these other guys and learned about their walk, and he's become a friend and a mentor, and I'm just so glad you got to be here. Thank you so much.

DIRECTOR MARQUEZ: Good morning.

ALL: Good morning.

DIRECTOR MARQUEZ: I had to check my watch. This is unplanned for. I just came to see J.D. receive this honor, and I'm really grateful for Ms. Vicki to involving me in this.

My message is simple today. Although I work for the American Legion, from the moment I started working for the American Legion, and previous prior to that when I joined the American Legion, I always heard the term Legion Family and from the moment I met Kathy Daudistel and then also Ms. Vicki and other folks from throughout the American Legion Auxiliary, I have dedicated myself to making sure that the Auxiliary and the American Legion in my role will always be a true American Legion Family and so that was my commitment to bringing J.D. today.

Thank you so much.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. Okay. We're going to continue on quickly, but what we're going to suggest is you keep the money and come to the question-and-answer session at 1:30 to present it there. But you can continue quickly on your donations.

DEPT. OF PUERTO RICO: Microphone 2.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Go ahead.

DEPT. OF PUERTO RICO: Department of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, \$140.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

DEPT. OF SOUTH CAROLINA: Microphone 3.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Wherever the spotlight's going to go. Microphone 1.

DEPT. OF PENNSYLVANIA: Microphone -- Department of Pennsylvania, \$555.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. Microphone 2.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Microphone 3.

DEPT. OF INDIANA: Microphone 2. Department of Indiana, \$1,000.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: How about microphone 3?

DEPT. OF SOUTH CAROLINA: Microphone 3. South Carolina, \$620.

DEPT. OF MARYLAND: Microphone 4. The Department of Maryland, \$150.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

DEPT. OF WASHINGTON: Department of Washington, \$220.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

DEPT. OF MICHIGAN: Department of Michigan, \$500.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. Microphone 3.

DEPT. OF CONNECTICUT: Department of Connecticut, \$140.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

DEPT. OF IOWA: Department of Iowa, 318.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

DEPT. OF OKLAHOMA: Department of Oklahoma, \$270.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. 2.

DEPT. OF NEW HAMPSHIRE: Department of New Hampshire, \$680.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Microphone 3.

DEPT. OF FLORIDA: Microphone 3. Department of Florida, \$685.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. Microphone 4.

DEPT. OF NEW MEXICO: Department of New Mexico, \$280.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. Back over to 1.

DEPT. OF MISSOURI: Department of Missouri, \$345.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. 2.

DEPT. OF NEW JERSEY: Department of New Jersey, \$300.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. Microphone 4.

DEPT. OF LOUISIANA: Department of Louisiana, \$260.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. 1.

DEPT. OF NEBRASKA: Department of Nebraska, \$600.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. Microphone 2.

DEPT. OF VIRGINIA: Department of Virginia, \$765.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. Microphone 4.

DEPT. OF KANSAS: Department of Kansas, \$349.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. Microphone 1.

DEPT. OF WYOMING: Department of Wyoming, \$180.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. Microphone 2.

DEPT. OF WISCONSIN: Department of Wisconsin, \$500.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. Microphone 4.

DEPT. OF KENTUCKY: Department of Kentucky, \$365.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. Microphone 1.

DEPT. OF CALIFORNIA: Department of California, \$730.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. Microphone 4.

DEPT. OF NORTH DAKOTA: Department of North Dakota,

\$142.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

DEPT. OF NEW YORK: Department of New York, \$510.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

DEPT. OF NORTH CAROLINA: Department of North Carolina, \$700.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Awesome. Thank you. Okay. I think -- microphone 2.

DEPT. OF ALASKA: Microphone 2. Department of Alaska, \$1,000.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. Thank you so much. We didn't expect this. I'm sure this is like drilling (phonetic). But this is awesome. Thank you so much.

COMMANDER LEHEW: Thank you so very much.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Oh, I'm sorry. Okay, come up. Come up. There's money flying everywhere, J.D.

DEPT. OF WEST VIRGINIA: Madam President?

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Where you at?

DEPT. OF WEST VIRGINIA: Microphone 3.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Microphone 3.

DEPT. OF WEST VIRGINIA: The Department of West Virginia has \$250.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. Go ahead.

NATIONAL OFFICERS: Madam President, your National Officers have \$100.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Awesome. Thank you.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The Officers was \$100.

(Applause.)

DEPT. OF MASSACHUSETTS: The Department of Massachusetts has increased. We're going to give you \$301.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. Okay. If there's any others, just go to the session at 1:30. He's full of all kinds of information. He would love to talk to everyone. Bring your donations there. We'll have someone there. We've got leadership --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: His wife will take care of the money.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Yes. The leadership will be there though to write it all down and give it to him, and we thank you so much, J.D. This has been phenomenal.

I wanted him to speak on the convention floor because a lot of times at the luncheon we don't have as many, and I wanted everyone to hear his story. So that's why I brought him here.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you everyone again. That was so unexpected, but you understand now why I chose Team Long Road to get this award.

This has come to the end of our session today. I'll see you tomorrow for session No. 2 at 8:30. We are now adjourned.

Thank you.

(Whereupon, at 11:48 a.m. on August 28, 2023, the above-entitled meeting was concluded.)

<u>Minutes Approval Committee</u>	<u>Date Approved</u>
Barbara White (AZ)	June 3, 2024
Sharon Spiker (KS)	June 3, 2024
Vicki Ozenbaugh (NE)	June 3, 2024

**2023 NATIONAL CONVENTION MISSION DRIVEN
AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY
102ND NATIONAL CONVENTION**



TUESDAY, AUGUST 29, 2023

NATIONAL CONVENTION SESSION II

**Charlotte Convention Center
Hall C1
Exhibit Level**

8:30 AM TO 11:16 AM

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P R O C E E D I N G S

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Good morning.

VOICES: Morning.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The 102nd National Convention of the American Legion Auxiliary will now come to order. Please take a moment to ensure your electronic devices are in silent mode. Thank you.

Our National Chaplain will lead us in our invocation.

CHAPLAIN PEEL: When God pushes you to the edge of difficulty, trust him. Trust him fully because two things can happen, either he will catch you when you fall, or he will teach you how to fly. Please bow your heads and pray with me.

Good morning, Heavenly Father. You gave us a restful night and brought us all back here today. Thank you. We seek your guidance as we go through the session today. May we feel your presence and your steady hand of direction for the good of our organization. We thank you for your love.

May we take your love and share it with our veterans, our military and communities. Help us to remember to be the one. With grateful and humble hearts, we pray for these things in your most holy name. Amen.

VOICES: Amen.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Before we begin, I wanted to share that your generous donations from yesterday, when that challenge was made when JD was up here totaled -- drum roll, please, ladies -- \$18,512.50. Can you believe that? That was so

unexpected, and JD was thrilled. They are getting ready to start their next walk this coming Sunday. So, thank you. Thank you, thank you from the bottom of my heart and his. It was just so surprising but, you know, that's what we do here. That's what we do.

So good morning.

VOICES: Good morning.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you to our national officers for greeting all of our attendees this morning. We have another full session in front of us so let's put the pedal to the metal and start the morning off with some amazing women that live life in the fast lane. Past National President Kathy Daudistel, would you please do the honors?

(Applause.)

MS. DAUDISTEL: From the Department of Oregon, Linda Boone, your 1992/'93 president.

(Applause.)

From the Department of Maryland, Linda Newsome, your '94/'95 national president.

(Applause.)

From the great Department of Kentucky, Virginia Hobbs, your '98/'99 national president.

(Applause.)

From the Department of New Hampshire, Kristine West, your 2000/2001 president.

(Applause.)

From the Department of Wisconsin, Jan Pulvermacher-Ryan, your 2007/'08 national president.

(Applause.)

From the Department of Ohio, Desiree Stoy, your 2008/2009 national president.

(Applause.)

From the Department of Texas, Carlene Ashworth, your 2010/'11 national president.

(Applause.)

From the Department of Virginia, Peggy Thomas, your 2012/2013 national president.

(Applause.)

From the Department of California, Nancy Brown-Park, '13/'14 national president.

(Applause.)

From the Department of Connecticut, Janet Jefford, your '14/'15 national president.

(Applause.)

From the Department of Illinois, Sharon Conatser, your '15/'16 national president.

(Applause.)

From the Department of Washington, Mary Davis, your '16/'17 national president.

(Applause.)

From the Department of Wisconsin, Diane Duscheck, your '17/'18 national president.

(Applause.)

And from the Department of Iowa, Nicole Clapp, your '19/2021 national president.

(Applause.)

MS. DAUDISTEL: And, of course, from the Department of Kentucky, Kathy Daudistel, your 2021-2022 national president.

(Applause.)

MS. DAUDISTEL: These ladies represent over 30 years of American Legion Auxiliary leadership at the highest level. Please let them know how much their service is appreciated.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you, ladies. They haven't told me if they're going to let me join their club yet so kind of, you know, say a little whisper in their ear when you see them.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Not until next year.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Yeah. No task was too big or too small for our members who support our armed forces and their families. Here to tell us more about how auxiliary members are volunteering to help military families is National Security Chairman Barb Washburn. Barb?

(Applause.)

MS. WASHBURN: Madam National President. Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to the winner's circle of the National Security Road Race of Champions. Our series has been a race to the end, and I'm happy to introduce our winning teams of our

year-long challenge.

In Lane 1, Team Blue Star Banners. Members of this team distributed hundreds of blue star banners to families of active-duty military. The team members of the Afraida (phonetic) Unit 28, Department of Washington set a track record by posting blue star banners at the three entrances of their town circuit.

In Lane 2, Team First Responders. The pit crews from the Departments of Florida, Michigan, and California honored first responders in their communities by delivering snacks and meals to stations, hosting recognition events and parties for their families and presenting certificates of appreciation. Interviews with first responders help members understand the unique challenges that first responders face and how much they appreciate our recognition and support.

In Lane 3, Team Red Friday. This team kept its traction while driving the courses this year. Everyone soon recognized the sea of red as an easy way to spread the message of "remember, everyone deployed." Let's keep the pedal to the metal by wearing red on Fridays. A special shout-out to the National Headquarters staff, the five VA&R Division chairmen and the departments of Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, South Dakota, and Wisconsin for their wonderful photos.

In Lane 4, Team Coupon Clippers. These team members did not need a learner's permit to use their trimming devices. Nearly 100,000 coupons for active-duty military stationed at

home and abroad were clipped and shipped by units in nearly every department. Overall, this team was turbo charged by assistance from many members as they cruised around the tracks. The Department of Pennsylvania reported a 50 percent increase in coupons clipped from last year.

In Lane 5, Team Active-Duty Military. This team took the checkered flag in every event in which it participated. Team members from Midland's Unit 305, the Department of Texas, participated in Boots for Troops, a program sponsored by a nonprofit company providing custom made combat boots for service members. Unit members donated their time and talents packing the boots with treats requested by the service members and then shipping the boots.

Unit 18 in Clayton, Delaware participated in the Stockings for Soldiers project that provides new socks for soldiers in Iraq, Jordan, and Kuwait reaching 42 different zip codes and 105 military groups. Members received and packed the socks along with snacks to be shipped to service members.

Falcon Unit 2008, Department of Colorado, supported Airman's Attic on Peterson Air Force Base, a free food bank service for junior enlisted airmen and their families. Members drop off monthly food items collected at their driver's meetings. During the baby food shortage, their members worked the circuit to locate and purchase formula.

And, finally, in Lane 6, Team POW/MIA Awareness. This team hit a new track record with members working hard in the

pits to promote awareness of POW/MIAs. Sutton Unit 414, Department of Massachusetts, hosted an impressive white table ceremony with members of their American Legion family. More crewmembers reported increased numbers of POW/MIA white tables and chair covers displayed.

The Department of Connecticut presented a large number of POW/MIA chair covers throughout the year. Rancho Cucamonga Unit 835, Department of California, formed a flag line to honor the return of missing in action and Naguabo (phonetic) Unit 15, Department of Puerto Rico, among many others, worked with their communities to hold POW/MIA recognition day ceremonies to pay special honor to those missing in action from their communities. This team was in maximum overdrive this past year introducing the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, DPAA, and its mission to everyone in the crowd. Through its mission, we are hopeful for more identification and a return of remains of missing service members. I know this is great news for our crew captain, National President Vickie.

The teams were neck and neck coming into the final turn with the season finale ending in a dead heat. Every team was a winner while working on the National Securities Program's Mission. I am proud to welcome them all to victory lane.

Madam President, this concludes my platform remarks but before I leave, it is my honor to introduce our Salute to Service Member award winners. Each of our winners will share a short narrative about their service to our country. Please join

me in welcoming our first recipient, Lieutenant Colonel Maria Shelton, U.S. Army.

(Applause.)

LIEUTENANT SHELTON: Hello. Good morning. First, I want to thank you for your warm welcome. I'm very honored and very humbled to be here. This was a complete surprise and I really appreciate your selection of me to be here. It really means a lot.

I came into the Army in 1999 when -- after I graduated from college as an ROTC and the best thing was, I was able to be in the Army and do what I went to school for, is to be a nurse. I'm currently stationed at Fort Bliss, El Paso, Texas, the beautiful desert.

Very little humidity, no rain. So come on out and visit. So, my time in the Army has been very rewarding, very humbling, and one of the most lessons I've learned is always it's not about me, it's about the service. It's about developing others and serving your country and I get to do it in two ways, being in the Army and being a nurse. So, thank you so much.

(Applause.)

MS. WASHBURN: Congratulations and thank you for your service.

Now, please join me in welcoming our next recipient, Petty Officer Third Class Colton Flook, U.S. Navy.

PO-3 FLOOK: All right. So, the first thing I'm going

to start off with is I have no speech written down so I'm improving (improvising?) this. Keep that in mind. All right?

Second off, it's a great pleasure to be chosen for this award. I was not expecting it. It was -- I didn't even know about this before I went to Iowa back in February time so -- there they are. They all remember me very well, we used to say.

I'm from Williamsburg, Pennsylvania. Little -- there's my people, Pennsylvania -- and Iowa, of course, but Little League World Series is my hometown as they know and as most of you will know, and I'm stationed in Groton, Connecticut. I'm part of the submarine force, nice. Let me get them all in there, huh? How about everybody just cheer. I'm a friend of all of you.

(Shout-outs).

PO-3 FLOOK: There you go. Beautiful. Either way, been three years. I started right out of high school in 2020. It was a very fun graduation, to say the least. Stayed outside my car waiting for my degree and we didn't have any senior graduation. It was very boring, but going straight into the military, you know, all the mess, needless to say, it was not a fun time but now it's been pretty good.

That's all I have got to say so thank you much for everyone.

(Applause.)

MS. WASHBURN: Congratulations and thank you for your

service.

Now please join me in welcoming our next recipient, one of our own, Corporal Sabrina Townes, U.S. Marines.

CORPORAL TOWNES: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

VOICES: Morning.

CORPORAL TOWNES: I'd like to start off by saying thank you so very much for this absolute honor and this award. I would also like to start off by saying thank you to my Michigan family for always supporting me as well as my family back home for their support.

I enlisted back in -- and went to boot camp back in 2019. I am about to hit four years next month and looking at reenlistment as of right now.

Being up here today when, at one point, I was in the seats as a junior member as well as an Auxiliary member, it's amazing to be up here in front of all of you. I can't tell you how grateful I truly am, but that is all that I have, and I hope you all have a wonderful day and thank you once again.

(Applause.)

MS. WASHBURN: Congratulations and thank you for your service. Now please join me in welcoming our next recipient, Staff Sergeant Dustin Zwydell, U.S. Air Force.

STAFF SERGEANT ZWYDELL: Good morning. My name is Staff Sergeant Dustin Zwydell. I'm stationed out of Abilene, Texas.

(Shout-outs.)

STAFF SERGEANT ZWYDELL: I'm originally from North Carolina. I joined 7-1/2 years ago straight out of college, so at first, I didn't know what to expect. It was a new thing for me because I wanted to go straight into grad school, but joining, I got the opportunity to work as a medical technician now for about 7-1/2 years. It's been a great opportunity. I love the support system, the different communities that come together as I was stationed overseas and here and Conus.

Overall, I know I want to keep going, see how much more people I can impact and see how much I can do for the community and to support others that are wanting to do the same as I am doing. At the moment, I am enlisted but I did get an opportunity to go over to the officer side as the medical service corps, so I will be doing that in 2024 so that's a great opportunity. Thank you.

So, I would like to thank you all for the support. Thank you, Abilene, Texas, for believing I could be that excellent service member and I hope you all have a great day. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. WASHBURN: Congratulations and thank you for your service.

Please join me in welcoming our next recipient, Boatswain's Mate, Chief Petty Officer Stefano Joseph Torre, U.S. Coast Guard.

CHIEF PETTY OFFICER TORRE: Good morning.

VOICES: Good morning.

CHIEF PETTY OFFICER TORRE: I got all the way down here from Alaska last night at like 2 o'clock so I'm going to have to keep this a little brief.

First, I want to say thank you to Seward Post 5, an outstanding community. Ms. Connie -- I know she's around here somewhere. There she -- Mr. Mike, Ms. Claire, I want to say thank you. Our ship went up to Seward -- oh, we got up there in January. We got a little lost, got a little sideways, and we were hanging out in drydock and they came and kind of took us under their wing and I was -- I just wanted to say thank you, so I went over there and just started washing dishes.

So here I am now and it's an honor to be here. Thank you. I've been doing this for about 18 years on a --

(Applause.)

CHIEF PETTY OFFICER TORRE: -- kind of a different level so I got a couple more years and then I'm going to finish it out, but if you're ever up in Alaska and you want to come see me, it's in Sitka. We're not very hard to find so thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. WASHBURN: Congratulations and thank you for your service.

Now please join me in welcoming our next recipient, Gunnery Sergeant Joshua S. Layton, U.S. Marine Reserves.

GUNNERY SERGEANT LAYTON: Good morning.

VOICES: Good morning.

GUNNERY SERGEANT LAYTON: Where's Illinois at?

(Shout-outs.)

GUNNERY SERGEANT LAYTON: There we go. My name is Josh Layton. Oh, make sure you have the right distance here. I Normally speak loud so forgive me.

I want to thank the Strasburg Unit 289 and the State of Illinois for nominating me for this award. Truth be told, I really didn't know what it was, but they said "Hey, we want to put you in for it" and I said "Okay. We'll see how it goes." About a few weeks later, I get a frantic email from a member, also my mother, "Check your email, check your email." I'm like "What? Tell me." Just check your email. "Okay."

So, I want to say thank you for the Committee for accepting -- selecting me for this award. It was a pleasure meeting the fellow candidates in the back. It was good to hear their stories and I know I'm in good company. Just so -- just a coincidence that today also marked the 107th year of the Marine Corps Reserves.

(Applause.)

GUNNERY SERGEANT LAYTON: I would also like to thank the logistics teams, the playing team, the coordinators for getting me out here. I didn't get -- I kind of didn't do the 2 o'clock, the morning flight, tonight, but the travel was a little difficult getting here but I tell you what, the whole support team was there when I needed them. They assisted me. I could not complain, could not say anything but great praises for

them, for the lack of sleep, transportation and, you know, trying to find food, all I could say is the 10 years of active-duty service has prepared me to come to here.

Whenever I was submitting my paperwork or submitting my assignment here for the requirements for the award, I was asked to write something about me which is always difficult. Now, talking, we have no problem doing it but, eh, because of 10 years of active-duty service and then my continuation in the reserves has been a team effort. I say it's been a team effort from the day I stepped on those yellow footprints to now and even before then with being raised by a family, it's been a team effort from family to leaders to mentors to friends. So, everything I've done to this day has been done by others. So, as I accept this award, please know that it's not just about me. It's by those that have been close to me, and I've always learned from.

(Applause.)

GUNNERY SERGEANT LAYTON: I got off active-duty service after 10 years, as I said. I went back to school, and I got hired on as a Veterans Service Officer from Effingham, Illinois. The best part about my job is I continue to work with veterans and hear their stories. Needless to say, it was working with them that got me -- I would say got that fire rekindled again to want to come back and join our -- to help serve again. So, I decided to join the reserves and I've been a reservist with Second Battalion 24th Marines at Chicago,

Illinois where I continue to this day.

So, in closing -- I think I took all the time I needed -- I want to thank you all again for the awards -- or for this award. Thank you for having me here. It's been great to see all the different displays, meet the different people and, of course, this is kind of awkward walking in here this morning hearing nothing but thank you for your service so I'm just --

(Applause.)

GUNNERY SERGEANT LAYTON: But, truth be told, just thank you for the support. There's been too many close friends that, unfortunately, have taken their lives after their service. We still battle with this condition today trying to extend those reach-out programs through them. So even a small comment of thank you for your service can definitely go a long way.

So, again, thank you for your support. God bless and for those Vietnam veterans in the crowd, welcome home. Semper Fidelis.

(Applause.)

MS. WASHBURN: Please join me in one more round of applause for our award winners as they come forward.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you so much for your service in allowing us to honor you today. You are our true heroes. Let's give another round of applause to all our service members.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: And thank you, Barb, for your report

and allowing us to honor our service members.

This morning is truly all about special guests. We just met our service members of the year and now I would like to introduce you to my special guest, Karen Wooster, the executive director of Wreaths Across America. As a volunteer and co-founder of Wreaths Across America, Karen tenaciously works on ways the organization can best remember the fallen, honor those who serve and teach our children that our freedoms are purchased at a great cost. Please welcome Karen Wooster to the stage. Karen?

(Applause.)

MS. WOOSTER: Hi, everybody. It's good to be out here because back there, it's cool and dark and I always manage to get in a room full of menopausal women so they're always hot and I am always freezing so -- going to warm up a little out here.

It has been so good being here. Just, you know, I grew up in a small community where the auxiliary was ever present. When something needed to be done, you were there. So always been a part of community life and to be here and see all the programs that you do and find out more -- and I know all of the country right now, so many of you take part in Wreaths Across America, whether you're location coordinators or just you take part in the ceremonies -- and I thank you all for that because Wreaths Across America is literally a family of volunteers. We have three million volunteers all over the country, a third of whom are kids.

And that brings me to my next favorite topic and one of the things that I think, as we go forward and just continue to embrace the relationship that we already have, and Vickie will speak a little bit to that in a second, but the programs that you have for the kids are so amazing.

A lot of people think that we just place wreaths. That's not all we do. Our mission is remembering and to teach which aligns with your mission very well. We have an incredible education program, and we work with all other organizations. That's one of the things that we're most proud of. We also work with other organizations to promote their organizations with our Give Back Program by using our sponsorship program and helping other organizations, very large organizations, and very small ones. We put more than \$23 million back into local communities for their BSOs. So, we're very proud of that.

We have our radio station. A lot of you got a chance to stop by and be on the radio station. I'm very proud of quickly becoming a station where we don't have the resources, but we gather resources and make it available, and we actually just got a nod from the VA for adding 26 podcasts that are relevant to veterans' services.

In addition to that, like I say, it's the teaching program, a curriculum we're so proud of in bringing kids on board. And I got to tell you, the radio station yesterday introducing and listening to the young ladies talk from Girls State Program, unbelievable. And I literally cried. I cried

and I am so proud of you for that work that you've done with the kids. I'm really, really looking forward to what else we can do together.

You know, when Wreaths Across America was formed -- accidentally, by the way -- we really listened, and we listened to people from your organization. We listened to the veterans because we wanted to know what was important for us to do and I also listened to a man who I absolutely love. I met Roger Donlin. Many of you may know Roger Donlin was the first Medal of Honor recipient for the Vietnam War and I said "Roger, tell me what's the most important thing that Wreaths Across America can do as an organization," and he didn't even bat an eye, "make our children love our country again." And you guys, you're getting that done and I'm so proud that we're going to have the opportunity to be just a little part of that.

And I always -- I write this quote down so I won't mess it up. It's kind of odd for somebody who places wreaths on headstones to say this, but we always ask that they say their names. When you place a wreath, we wanted to say the names. We believe a person dies twice; the first time when their heart stops beating and their life leaves their body, but the last time is when their name is spoken for the very last time and there are Gold Star Families in this audience who know what I'm talking about. We need to keep the memory alive forever.

So I'm excited and ask Vickie to come up and tell about our news, but I'm going to leave you with a quote from

Pericles, so it's been around a long time. "What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone or stone monuments but what is woven into the lives of others" and just being here in the last couple of days, I've seen you guys really weaving the important things about this country into the lives of others and, as a parent, a grandparent and a citizen, I thank you for that, and I thank you for the privilege of being able to go forward working with your organization.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: We just recently signed an MOU which is a memorandum of understanding with Wreaths Across America. I'm so proud.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Karen, I'm so excited to see what our organizations can do together.

I would like to present our delegates and attendees with a courtesy resolution to officially capture the collaboration of our two great organizations. Would our Convention Resolutions Chairman Lisa Chaplin, please join us on stage to present?

MS. CHAPLIN: Thank you, Madam President. There is this courtesy resolution:

WHEREAS the dedicated delegates, alternates and guests have gathered in Charlotte, North Carolina for the American Legion Auxiliary 102nd National Convention to hear the accomplishments of the world's largest patriotic auxiliary organization, and to show their dedication to and their

membership serving our heroes and mission outreach efforts, and Wreaths Across America, an incredible organization whose mission is to remember our fallen U.S. veterans, honor those who serve and teach our children the value of freedom. Wreaths Across America's so closely aligns with ours as they continue to pay homage to our heroes after they have passed from this world;

WHEREAS, the past national presidents, the national officers, the national chairman and national committee members have shown their commitment to this great organization by promoting programs, mentoring new leaders, and celebrating a year of accomplishments, and to celebrate the support already provided to Wreaths Across America by our members in all departments by means of volunteer time and dollars spent, by sponsoring wreaths placed on veterans' graves across our great nation; and

WHEREAS, the national and local convention committees, the National Headquarters staff, convention center staff, City of Charlotte and the members of the Department of North Carolina have extended a warm hand of hospitality to all of us, and the opportunity to commemorate the relationship between our two organizations and recognize how we are mutually beneficial to each other by sharing our mission, our time, and existing networks. Many members of The American Legion Family already volunteer in their communities by sponsoring wreaths or volunteering their time to place wreaths on graves of veterans and cemeteries across the country;

BE IT RESOLVED that we express our heartfelt excitement for the endless possibilities that might be realized through future collaboration between these two great organizations by giving applause; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we will strengthen this relationship between our two organizations in the coming years by giving applause.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Yes, with your applause, this courtesy resolution is adopted. Thank you, Lisa, and thank you, Karen, for being with us today. I would like to get a picture with you.

MS. CHAPLIN: Certainly.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: And just a little side note, Lisa, you're getting ready to get a new member.

MS. CHAPLIN: Which I could have taken care of in December.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: I know, but she'll be in your year so it's all good.

As I planned for my National presidency, I knew I would need to pick a fundraising focus for my year. As National President, the focus you choose is so important because it's an opportunity to leave the organization a little bit better than you found it.

Here's a quick look at what your generosity will enable veterans and their companions to experience in the coming years.

(Music.)

"The American Legion Auxiliary has been involved with the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival since 2000. In the year since, the (indiscernible) has (indiscernible) to become a co-presenter of the event along with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The Festival gives our nation's veterans the chance to express themselves through different art mediums, heal from traumatic experiences, and gain a sense of comradery that was part of military life. Their companions often witness all of it."

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: I came up with this idea of my project when I attended my first National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. Working breakfast one morning, I saw a couple walk up, him with a cane knowing he needed help with his tray and meals and his wife turned around and walked away. I immediately decided that that's something that we needed to do. We needed to pay for those companions to have their meals with their veterans because they are the lifeline, and that's what we do as The American Legion family.

MS. KIMBLER: Veterans traveling to the festival often have a companion who attends with them. The companions provide both emotional and physical support to the veteran to ensure that they have the most accessible experience at the event.

MR. STANG: Well, I've been coming over 25 years to the festival and in the later years here without Margaret, I don't think I would come to the Festival anymore because I need her and appreciate her help so much. It's -- she does so much for me. I don't think I would come without her.

MS. STANG: I've been coming with Rick for several years and there was a time I didn't have anything to do, so I volunteered my time to work in the costumes and it just kind of hung with me. So besides coming to help him, I also help a lot of other veterans.

(Music medley.)

MR. DOUGHERTY: I've been coming to the Creative Arts Festival since 2012, and I've been fortunate enough to have my wife come with me and attend each one.

MS. DOUGHERTY: I've had to support my husband in any way that he needs me during the week, and I'm absolutely grateful for all the women and the men in the ALA. This year they were so wonderful to me to provide my meal ticket for a week.

(Ringling of the bell.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: And we took our companions on a trolley tour of St. Louis.

(Videotape.)

MS. KIMBLER: This year we are grateful to National President Vickie for her support of companions at this event. Without the support, many companions would not be able to

attend.

(Videotape.)

For more information about how departments, units and members can continue the ALA legacy of supporting veterans. Visit www.alaforveterans.org.

(Music.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: I love that video. It's brand new so I haven't seen it so bear with me, a little teary-eyed. But you get it now? Do you get it why we love this program so much?

The National Veterans Creative Arts Festival has continued to be an event that is near and dear to my heart. It's an event that wouldn't be possible without the tireless efforts and passion of our next guest. Please welcome to the stage National Veterans Creative Arts Festival Director, Amy Kimbler.

(Music.)

MS. KIMBLER: Oh, that's a fun walk-up song.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Yeah.

MS. KIMBLER: I have not seen that video yet either. I had goose bumps the whole time. Oh, I hope you enjoyed it. That was really, really fun to see.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Madam President. It is truly an honor to be here. The American Legion Auxiliary demonstrates -- oh, I think I need these. I wasn't sure. Oh, much better. Okay. The American Legion Auxiliary demonstrates service to veterans through their involvement with programs like

the National Veterans Creative Arts Competition and Festival. You get it. You understand how art, writing, dance, drama, and music can help veterans cope with physical and emotional pain, their mental health struggles, how their involvement in the arts enhances their overall health and well-being and how participating in the arts brings people together.

Since the year 2000, you have been actively involved with us in making a strong and positive difference in the lives of veterans and their companions who participate in the Creative Arts as therapy. With The American Legion by our side for the past 20 years, the Creative Arts Program for Veterans has increased to where this past year, over 3,000 veterans from 129 VA facilities entered local VA competitions. That's a huge number. Yes.

The entries these veterans submitted represent a small sampling of the day-to-day therapy that is being done within VA facilities and in communities across America for veterans expressing themselves through the arts. The American Legion Auxiliary members have been involved with the local VA competitions in a big way. Here are some examples of their support and a few words from our staff.

From the great State of Texas, the new VA staff person told me that she held her first live and in-person Creative Arts Competition in their auditorium at the Houston VA in July. She partnered with VA's education department and The American Legion and Auxiliary volunteers as a group effort.

Money was donated towards refreshments and the Auxiliary helped by finding judges for the competition. She said their assistance and help with preparation and setup was invaluable.

From Iowa, the Hawkeye State and food capital of the world, the VA staff told me that the Auxiliary is doing great things in Des Moines, and they are always, always ready to help whenever they're needed.

From the Empire State in New York, over the years, the local ALA has provided sponsorship through the purchase of airline and bus tickets to assist veterans with their travel to and from the festival. They also assist with purchasing much needed clothing, if needed.

Throughout the country and for many years, the American Legion Auxiliary has supported veteran creativity by providing monetary donations for art supplies by helping to find venues outside of the VA when needed, especially during the COVID time, providing refreshments, purchasing clothing, attending local shows and volunteering at the local events.

I know you have choices in where you give your time and money. No matter how great or small, every minute of your time and every dollar given are very much appreciated and they go a long way in meeting the veterans' needs.

From all of the VA staff throughout the country, sincerely thank you. Thank you also to the Auxiliary's leadership team whom we've had the privilege of working with

over the past 20-plus years. Each of the former national presidents have become great Festival friends to us and this year, it has been our sincere honor to work with Madam President Vickie Koutz.

Vickie has been a great support to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival for several years and this year even more so. All of you already know what her special project this year was and how it changed lives for veterans and their companions and caregivers attending the festival. Their comfort, their experience, their happiness was of utmost importance to her and through her efforts and yours, a huge burden was lifted from veterans' hearts and minds.

Veterans and their companions have peace of mind knowing they could truly experience all of the Festival event together. Companions could be sure the veterans were engaging in conversation, maybe also making good choices at meals, but eating healthy, and most importantly, that they were not alone.

The companions were provided opportunities to connect with each other to share stories, form relationships, and find respite moments and healing with one another. I cannot thank you enough, Vickie, for your vision and compassion for veterans, their companions and caregivers and their experiences in the arts.

Our hope is that veterans who participate in the National Veterans Creative Arts Competition come away with the sense of accomplishment and with a feeling of strong motivation

to explore other areas of their lives where they can achieve that same feeling of success and happiness.

In the Spring of 2024, approximately 150 Gold Medal winning veterans of the art, creative writing, dance, drama, and music national competitions will be invited to gather in Denver to participate in the festival experience. The VA Eastern Colorado health care system and the American Legion Auxiliary Department of Colorado are gearing up to put together a mile-high festival experience for the veterans and their caregivers.

The veterans will participate in therapeutic visual art workshops, writing seminars, and performing art rehearsals. It's a chance to show the community that the use as therapy and treatment of America's veterans -- the use of arts as therapy and the treatment of America's veterans has value. It is strong and it is enduring.

Before I leave the podium this morning, I just want to say once more how grateful we are for all of your past, present, and continuing support of the National Veterans Creative Arts Program. We appreciate your role as co-presenter and ongoing commitment to veterans and the arts. Thank you again. Please enjoy this one shorter little video and have a wonderful convention here in Charlotte.

(Applause.)

(Videotape.)

MS. WEISNER: It's incredible to see the amount of talent that our veterans have because it's a part of them you

never see when you're actually active duty or in the reserves.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I just see these veterans here that can sing, can dance, that have done artwork and poetry. It brings back so many memories of when I was in the service.

MS. HALL: It is so important to gather our veterans here. They make lifelong friends here. They learn new skills and techniques and all of that contributes to their health and well-being, which is really what we're all about here at the VA.

MR. ARIAL: That's where the group of veterans really helps with my anxiety, and they know, more or less, that I'm dealing with stuff, so it's helped a lot.

MS. BALLARD: You've got this community of friends that know where you've been, know your struggles and they support and uplift each other.

MR. LIMB: So, when we come here, we talk, we laugh, we forget about our problems for awhile.

MR. MANUEL-ORNALES: Say it's a bonding that we can relate to each other and that's why we're all here right now.

MS. AMPMAN: I think events like this really show the value of the term "it takes a village."

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I look at it in the sense of a form of venting and showing that we're still here because many of us depend on this outlet.

MS. ROBISON: Because I think if I hadn't had art, I would have (indiscernible) up a long time ago. It's a common thing that we all have that we can talk about because a lot of

vets don't talk about their service.

MR. KNAUER: Hearing somebody else who's in the same dark place, and we all join hands and play each other up by having the roundtable where everybody can talk about how they got into writing. It's like food. It's like nourishment to your soul.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Amy, you know what, while you're up here, let's recognize those departments that work so hard to raise money for the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. Take a look at our gold, silver and bronze donor departments on the big screen.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Don't look. Don't look.

MS. KIMBLER: I have two more. Can I just add two more to this list?

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Okay. Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

MS. KIMBLER: I just want to also recognize the state Department of Michigan. I know you give your funds in another way, but I truly want to say thank you to you at the silver level of sponsorship.

(Shout-outs.)

MS. KIMBLER: Yes, thank you. And also, to the Department of Missouri for hosting the hospitality room this year at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in St. Louis. They donated at a platinum level of sponsorship. So,

thank you, Department of Missouri.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: I love to see how committed our members are to this program and how committed they were to donate to my project. I am happy to announce that as of today, we've raised a total of -- drum roll, please -- \$87,552 --

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: -- in support of the companion experience and the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. Your generosity will live on far beyond this year. A big thank you to all who donated and thank you, Amy, for joining us today.

MS. KIMBLER: Oh, thank you so much. I have goose bumps.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Oh, isn't that awesome.

MS. KIMBLER: Thank you. Thank you, truly, so much. Thank you.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

MS. KIMBLER: All right. Thank you.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: And let's get a picture.

MS. KIMBLER: Oh, okay.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: She didn't know that total either. I surprised her.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. For a veteran coming home is the beginning of a new journey, a transition to find a new normal. Here to tell us more about how our members use the ALA mission as a driving force to comfort and care for veterans

during this transition is National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Chairman Trish Ward.

(Music.)

MS. WARD: Madam National President, the purpose of the Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Program is to promote programs and services that assist and enhance the lives of veterans and their families and, in support of this call to arms, our members once again did not disappoint. We buckled up, hit the gas, and got ready for action.

As we think about the amazing work accomplished across our departments and units in support of our veterans, three themes come immediately to mind: care, comfort, and kindness. Caring for our veterans and their families is the driving force when planning a project or actioning on an issue and although veterans are a priority, our female veterans received lots of special care this year.

Bravo to LeBron Unit 58 in Guthrie, Oklahoma. Members in the Sooner State proudly supported the Oklahoma City VA facilities' annual drive-through baby shower for new and expected moms. Baby essentials and gifts were available for all and the best thing about this project was the community event.

We also have to give a special well done to the Department of Mississippi who supported Final Salute, Inc. whose mission is to provide a safe haven and transitional housing for female veterans and their children. Known as the invisible homeless, women veterans are two to three times more likely to

be homeless than any other group in the U.S. adult population. Great job to the Magnolia State for recognizing this growing trend and for playing a role to help women and their families get back on their feet.

We provide comfort to our veterans every day and in so many ways. Hey, Wyoming, we see you. The little department that could and did in a big way. At their fall workshop, members filled blessing bags with socks, hygiene items, power bars, and snacks for a stand down held by the Cheyenne VA but, wait, there's more, a lot more.

Since we're talking about comfort, we've got to give a shout-out to the members who took their sewing skills and fabric to the next level. Whether making a quilt, altering costumes at the Creative Arts Festival or just knitting a scarf, our members made sure our veterans were warm, safe, and looking their best.

Three cheers to the team in St. Hedwig, Texas, Unit 389, who supported the Warm Feet for Warriors Project bringing comfort to brave souls. More than 96 pairs of socks were acquired and delivered to those veterans in need.

President Abraham Lincoln said, "Honor to the soldier and sailor everywhere who bravely his country's cause. Honor also to the citizen who cares for his brother in the field and serves as best he can the same cause." For more than a hundred years, the members of the American Legion Auxiliary have stood steadfast and served our brothers and sisters in the field. We view it as a responsibility and a call to arms and thanks for

the freedoms we enjoy and value. And this is defined by the kindness displayed by our members every day and in so many ways.

Our Christmas Gift Shops led the pack with small departments and large making sure, in spite of the COVID restrictions, our veterans and their loved ones enjoy the spirit of the holidays. From Massachusetts to Missouri and beyond, our gift shops provide holiday recognition to our veterans whether at home, in the hospital, or abroad. This act of caring and giving only sets the stage for the Salute to Hospitalized Veterans Week where Valentine's Day and our kind spirit takes on a new meaning.

Even the kids of Carthage Unit 789 in New York got in on the action as they designed and delivered heartfelt messages of thanks and love for the Valentines for Veterans Project.

As the Be the One initiative took flight, our members embraced the concept to Be the One to help a veteran in crisis by bringing about awareness to ending the stigma of seeking mental health for our veterans who are struggling. Kudos to the Department of Maine and the You Will Never Walk Alone President's Project that raised an astonishing 58,000 plus for Maine's VA Suicide Prevention Outreach Team and made it their mission to vigorously campaign on behalf of veteran suicide awareness.

Care, comfort, and kindness in the form of time, talent, and treasurer is who we are, is what we do. And in the spirit of service, not self, President Barack Obama said "It's

about how we treat our veterans every single day of the year. It's about making sure they have the care they need and the benefits that they've earned when they come home." It is our mission, it is our duty, and it remains our priority on behalf of those we serve.

Madam National President, this concludes my platform remarks.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thanks, Trish. Through leadership, you will plant the seeds of success, and growth will continue. That was the goal of the Leadership Committee this year and they were able to achieve great results. Let's welcome National Leadership Chairman Nancy Magginnis to tell us more. Nancy?

(Music.)

MS. MAGGINNIS: Madam President, John Quincy describes a leader by stating if your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader. Ladies and gentlemen, start your engines as the leadership program hit the race in full gear ready to improve the knowledge of our members about the American Legion Auxiliary.

After taking the green flag, departments were racing fast and furious with boot camps, fall conferences, schools of instruction, and various other forms of teaching our members about the ALA. These programs included duties of officers and chairmen, ALA protocol, how to wear ALA pins, parliamentary procedure, the value of our members, and more, a great start to

our race as we pass the first turn.

The National Leadership Committee each shared their personal leadership journey showing our members that leadership starts and progresses differently for each member. As we moved into the second turn, the Department of New York redesigned their midwinter conference to train members through four programming tracks and with four workshops each. This allowed them to showcase the talents, skills, and knowledge of every-day members as presenters. What a great way to encourage leadership and help develop skills in ALA members.

In addition, diversity, equity, and inclusion training was held for their department executive committee where they learned about their personal biases and created safe spaces for all members. Onto the back straightaway and into Turn 3, the Department of Virginia created a committee interest form to find the undiscovered gems in their departments. The form asked members what ALA committees best suited their talents and experiences. This gives the rookies a chance to work with committee advisers where they learn more about the chairman's responsibilities as well as an opportunity to share ideas with the chairman. Their goal is to turn their rookies into future department leadership champions.

In the fourth turn, the Department of Rhode Island, Unit 85 President made a scrapbook documenting their efforts. She didn't know about reporting requirements but was simply excited about their unit activities. Viewing this scrapbook

builds excitement in the unit and is shown to new members to teach them what the ALA does.

Leadership activities throughout the ALA are best summed up by an Ohio member when she stated, "The future of leadership lies within the core of each of us who decides to take on such an important role and responsibility. Leadership must also set forth a good, positive role model example both in social media and in person."

As we were entering the home stretch toward the checkered flag, we were reminded that mentoring is an important part of leadership. As one member stated from the Department of New Hampshire, "Just because I know something doesn't mean everyone does."

To recognize mentors, the Department of Arizona created the Hometown Hero Award. Members were asked to write a narrative about the member who encouraged them to become an active ALA member. The hometown heroes were recognized and presented certificates at their department convention. What a great checkered flag reward.

Per Eleanor Roosevelt, "A good leader inspires people to have confidence in the leader. A great leader inspires people to have confidence in themselves." This quote describes National President Vickie, "She is an inspiration to all members of the American Legion Auxiliary. Through her leadership, members revved their engines, raced hard, took pitstops when needed, won the leadership race, and received the checkered flag

for their rewards." Madam President, this concludes my platform remarks.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you, Nancy. Strengthening in our communities is something American Legion Auxiliary members strive for every single day. It's why we operate under the motto Service, Not Self. Please welcome Melanie Taylor, National Community Service Chairman, to tell us more about how our members contributed to their communities. Melanie?

(Music.)

MS. TAYLOR: Service with a smile. Madam National President, ladies and gentlemen, start your engines, and start your engines you did. I want you to buckle up as I share with you all the accomplishments of this year's community service racing team.

Many units felt the need to help their communities by taking part in their local food pantries. Edward A. Ribeiro, Unit 40, in Plymouth, Massachusetts saw the need in their community and took it upon themselves to start a food pantry after the Catholic Church closed their doors due to COVID.

They started with \$500 cash and their goal was to assist the veterans in their community. Soon it became evident that there was a need communitywide, not just for the veterans. So they opened their doors to whomever was in need. Their members do all the shopping and pick up the donations weekly. They offer a variety of items including paper goods, fresh

fruit, vegetables, and meat.

They rely on the cash donations from their legion family members as well as the community. Flyers were sent out weekly with the items needed. Panera Bread donates stale bread and other local community organizations provide additional canned goods. They serve an average of 40 households per week. Now, when the holidays roll around, they have been able to give out gift cards to help support the Salvation Army by raising and donating \$1,000 per year for their holiday baskets.

They pushed the pedal to the metal and set their sights for the finish line as they donated \$4,780 in cash and products and volunteered 5,720 hours to gather goods and run the food pantry.

(Applause.)

MS. TAYLOR: They can be very proud of their accomplishment this year as they step into the winner's circle. Many units reported posting colors at local events. California's Jackie Robinson, Unit 252 Color Guard posted colors not only at local events but also presented the American Legion Auxiliary proudly while posting colors at the L.A. Rams football games.

They were up at 6:00 a.m. to present colors for NBC employees at Universal Studios and then went on to the City of Inglewood's commemoration of Memorial Day. "These ladies are turbo charged and ready to present our nation's colors, especially when asked to honor our female veterans," said color

guard Captain Anita Biggs.

Units reported participating in 911 National Day of Service and Remembrance, Make a Difference Day, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service. Oak Orchard, Riverdale, Unit 28, in Millsboro, Delaware held two significant events and stepped on the gas to Make the Difference Day and Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service. This unit held a driver's meeting and partnered with the homeless liaisons at two local school districts after hearing that there were hundreds of homeless children in their schools.

Community Service Chairman, Pit Boss, Suzanne Glatfelter, collaborated with the school districts to determine what the needs were for these children. A list of items was prepared and a plea for help went out to the public. The generosity of that community was amazing. Thanks to the outpouring support, 200 backpacks were packed and delivered to the schools for each day of service totaling 400 backpacks.

Volunteers from The Legion family, sororities at Delaware State University, and other nonprofit organizations helped pack the items for distribution. Thanks to the Unit's Public Relations Chairman Tina Washington, all of Unit 28's projects for the community are advertised in the local newspapers, their on-line calendar, and Facebook.

Madam President, Vickie, after reading the Department's end-of-the-year reports, it appears that some of our unit drivers just got their learner's permit. Some driver's

hit the wall while others accelerated and took the checkered flag to victory.

I am so pleased to report 100 percent reporting for our departments this year. Thank you all so very, very much.

(Applause.)

MS. TAYLOR: It has been my honor to serve as your community service chairman this year; and as I now take my final lap around the track, I thank you, Madam President, for this appointment. Madam President, this concludes my platform remarks.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thanks, Mel. The American Legion Auxiliary Foundation positively impacts the lives of our veterans, military and their families by defending American Legion Auxiliary programs today and for future generations. Here to tell us more about how our generous donors and supporters were able to make a difference in the lives of veterans and their families is American Legion Auxiliary Foundation Board President, Cathleen MacInnes. Cathy?

(Music.)

MS. MACINNES: Oh, my. Madam President and members, the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation exists for one reason, to support the programs of the American Legion Auxiliary today and for future generations.

Donations to the Mission Endowment Fund fuel our engines for support for American Legion Auxiliary programs. During this administration, the Mission Endowment Fund earnings

have enabled the Foundation to provide \$45,000 to the American Legion Auxiliary to support their co-presenter ship of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival and \$20,000 to the ALA Girls Nation program.

Since July of 2022, the Veteran Projects Fund has set a new track record providing units, districts, and departments with \$73,510 to assist in their efforts for our veterans. These volunteer pit crews throughout the country have provided comfort, caring, and they have enabled outdoor accessibility for our abled and disabled veterans alike: a canopy for the courtyard at the Chippewa Veterans Home in Wisconsin; a wheelchair bicycle built for two for the New York State Veterans Home in Oxford; and kayaks, canoes, panels and life vests for a water therapy program in Minnesota.

This year's local Veterans Creative Arts Festival grants serve to increase the participation in the programs at their respective facilities. Musical instruments and a variety of supplies meant that every veteran participating had sufficient tools to create their art. Mission and Action grants in the last year of this program were awarded to 18 units and one department allowing the recipients to increase visibility and to educate nonmembers about the work the ALA does and our National President discovered only long after the fact that one of those recipients was her unit.

Grant application champions across all types of grants, the Department of New York with five applications, the

Departments of Indiana and Minnesota with three applications each, and the Departments of Georgia and South Carolina with two applications each. Any of these applicants will tell you how easy it is to apply. It's a very short grant form: who are you, what do you want to do, and how much will it cost. The application is available online where you can file online, or you can print the forms and mail them in. We really hope everyone has at least five grants next year in your department.

We want to recognize and thank our top five donor departments as well calculated by combining the donations from the units and members within each department as well as those from the department itself, the Departments of Minnesota, California, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Texas. In 2024, we hope that each department will appoint an ALA Foundation chairman to increase awareness of the Foundation, help units apply for grants and, of course, to solicit donations because we do need fuel to keep our engines moving.

Take a moment to stop by the Wall of Heroes just near Starbucks, donate to the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation and add the names of your loved ones to the wall. We accept cash, check, credit cards and this year, you can text HERO to 1-844-940-3450 to make your gift. We had lots of requests for that last year. And while you're there, check out the silent auction display. Bidding starts at 10:30 a.m. this morning and will take -- the winners will be announced at the close of State's Dinner and don't forget the wine poll while you're at

the State's Dinner.

All donations made at this Convention will go to the Mission Endowment Fund. This amazing team, the members of the ALA Foundation Board and the development staff led by our new director, Carlie Schutz, have just been awesome this year. Retiring from the Board -- we look a lot better in person than we do in those pictures -- retiring from the Board this year, our elected director is Rosemary Haack and Kathy Kaotis, National President Vickie Koutz, and National Secretary Coral May Grout, but we do look forward to welcoming new board members Danielle Applegate; Anne Fournier; Trish Ward, who is returning to the Board after an absence of 10 years; and Kathy Daudistel returning to the Board after an absence of a year.

Our most sincere thanks to every one of you for using grants to enhance the lives of America's veterans and for your contributions to the ALA Foundation. Madam President, that concludes my platform remarks.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Would the Resolutions Chairman please come forward to present a courtesy resolution?

MS. CHAPLIN: Thank you, Madam President.

WHEREAS, the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation has contributed liberally and consistently from their fiscal resources to American Legion Auxiliary programs like American Legion Auxiliary Girls Nation and the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival; and

WHEREAS, the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation continues to use veteran projects funds and Veterans Creative Arts Festival grants to empower units and departments to forge partnerships with their local veteran service organizations and VA facilities to fund community projects,

BE IT RESOLVED that the American Legion Auxiliary offers its profound thanks to the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation for their financial commitment to bettering the lives of veterans, military, and their families by giving applause.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: And, again, with your applause, this courtesy resolution is adopted. Thank you, Lisa and Cathy.

National Treasurer, Mary Beth Revoir, is charged with overseeing the management and reporting of our organization's finances. Their responsibilities and actions have a strong impact on the public's perception and trust in our organization. Therefore, those who serve in the role of national treasurer must possess desirable skills such as financial literacy, attention to detail, and a willingness to ask questions. Here with her report, please welcome National Treasurer Marybeth Revoir. Marybeth?

(Music.)

MS. REVOIR: Good morning.

VOICES: Good morning.

MS. REVOIR: "The hope I have today is that this past year may be but the great stepping stone over which a great

edifice will be built." Our first national president, Edith Hobart, shared these remarks at the American Legion Auxiliary's second National Convention. How insightful this great leader was.

Each year we strive to up our game, to surpass our previous accomplishments, and further the impact of our mission. Let's highlight a few things that were made possible by our membership and support of the American Legion Auxiliary. A great place to start is members helping members. The Auxiliary Emergency Fund was founded by a member, Helen Colby Small's donation. It has awarded thousands of grants since its inception in 1969 to our members, those exposed to a national disaster or personal crisis that causes them financial distress. Generous donations from across the American Legion Auxiliary perpetuate this program.

The American Legion Auxiliary Girls Nation Program is a platform with the potential to change the young women each year as they grow into impactful women who will lead this world. This premier program supported by Department ALA Girl States has touched the lives of thousands over the years. Girls Nation President Isabella will be awarded a \$5,000 scholarship on behalf of the American Legion Auxiliary.

You are looking at a proud participant of Girls State from 19 er-er-er. Don't know that I want to admit, actually, when that was, but I will gleefully share that it is one of my fondest memories of the American Legion Auxiliary.

The National Junior Meetings again held regionally this year brought together a diverse group of children whose interest in our organization can be infectious. An instruction on proper etiquette and care of our nation's flag was front and center along with the reminders we shall never forget the sacrifice made by those who served our country to keep us safe.

It was a desire some 30 years ago of one man to place wreaths on all 257,000 graves in Arlington National Cemetery. He began with 5,000 wreaths and Wreaths Across America was born, as we heard earlier today. It's now considered the longest veterans' parade crossing some seven states on its path to Arlington. The American Legion Auxiliary is very proud to be a participant in this program.

A program near and dear to National President Vickie's heart had another phenomenal year, the National Creative Arts Festival which brings together talented veterans invited to the national competition after competing at their local VA facilities. This program has grown to many thousands of local participants with over 2,000 being judged at the national level in 150 categories such as creative writing, dance, music and visual arts, to name a few. The ALA sponsorship in this festival is a shining star in our repertoire.

If you go back and think about one of our mantras and remember who we are, what we do, and why it matters. We're a group of dedicated volunteers who participate and our participation in the American Legion Auxiliary allows these and

many other programs to flourish. It allows us to employ dedicated and knowledgeable staff and to train and support eager volunteers to be the backbone of our events and programs nationwide.

Going back to President Edith Hobart, she further hoped that our achievements may be so great in the future years that our small beginnings may become a part of a misty past. This wonderful group of women can and will accomplish all of this, I hope, and I leave with you my urgent prayer to carry on. President Hobart, we have carried on and, know, you would be proud of what we have become.

I'd like to give a big thank you to the communication staff who as so helpful in arranging all of these slides and pictures to show you many of the different things we have supported over this past year.

Madam President, this concludes my platform remarks and it's been my honor to serve with you.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Oh.

(Applause.)

MS. REVOIR: And you, too, Madam Vice President.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you, Mary Beth. You're welcome.

I changed. So, serving beside the National Treasurer is the National Finance Committee to help ensure the longevity and the fiscal health of our organization and, with that note, I will introduce our National Finance Chairman, Sharon Conatser.

(Music.)

MS. CONATSER: Good morning.

VOICES: Morning.

MS. CONATSER: The National Finance Committee has faced several challenges this year but continues to meet today's needs as well as future fiduciary requirements. The Committee is comprised of five appointed members. Missing in this awesome picture is Paula Raney from the Department of Texas.

The Committee reviews the draft budgets, makes any adjustments needed to reflect new or changing goals, and recommends the budget to the National Executive Committee for its adoption.

Also, in carrying out its role as fiduciary stewards, the American Legion Auxiliary National Finance Committee is responsible for investment planning, reviewing financial statements, monitoring member benefits and fundraising campaigns, reviewing and overseeing the financial policies of the organization, and making fiscal policy recommendations for NEC action to ensure that our American Legion Auxiliary national organization is meeting nonprofit benchmarks and governmental requirements in keeping with best practices.

The National Finance Committee designates one committee member as a liaison member to the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation Board of Directors and another liaison member to the American Legion Auxiliary National Risk and Compliance Committee.

Due to responsible oversight, your Finance Committee believes strongly in the value to members of the ALA mission training and our ALA national junior meetings. Our plan is to continue to keep costs at all affordable prices to make these trainings inclusive to all of our members.

The fundraising efforts by our direct mail vendor continue this year with five appeals, three for the ALA and two for the ALA Foundation. Fiscal year direct mail donations as of June 30th totaled \$894,461 for the ALA and the ALA Foundation.

(Applause.)

MS. CONATSER: Every year about one-third of the direct mail donations come from nonmembers. We thank our generous donors both inside and outside of the ALA for their continued support of our great mission.

In 2017, the trend of diminishing members caused a financial burden to the organization and was identified and brought to the attention of our convention delegates. We'd like to thank each of you in this room for passing the dues increase. However, that does not mean we should stop recruiting members as that makes our organization stronger. Ask your friends to join today.

We urge each auxiliary member to recognize their duty of fiduciary stewardship so that the ALA will be able to be here for another generation to serve our mission and help our veterans for many years. So, on behalf of the National Finance Committee, thank each of you for your dedication, your

commitment, and the generous financial support of the Auxiliary's tireless efforts to fulfill our mission.

Madam President, this concludes my platform remarks.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Go going. Nice talk. Thank you, Sharon. Much appreciated. The National Risk and Compliance Committee is in the driver's seat when it comes to ensuring our organization is in compliance with legal and regulatory requirements. We are all mission driven. This committee is our seatbelt serving to protect us and keep us safe. Please welcome to the stage the National Risk and Compliance Committee Chairman, Carol Westergren.

(Applause.)

(Music.)

MS. WESTERGREEN: Good morning.

VOICES: Morning.

MS. WESTERGREN: Madam National President Vickie, thank you for the honor of serving as the Chair for Risk and Compliance. This year Risk and Compliance Committee has had the pedal to the metal working with the National Headquarters staff and leadership to ensure the American Legion Auxiliary and the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation stays in compliance with IRS regulations and our own policies that we have put into place. Our focus has been making sure we stay on track.

The Committee is pleased to announce that the audit has been completed and that the American Legion Auxiliary and

the ALA Foundation came through with no problems.

(Applause.)

MS. WESTERGREN: We had provided oversight for the timely filings for our income tax and our 990 documents in early March of 2022. The National Risk and Compliance Committee interviewed firms to conduct an informational technology assessment of the ALA, including cybersecurity test.

After conducting the interviews, the Committee selected Crow, LLP to conduct the assessment which geared up and started in October of 2022. The overall objective of this assessment was to better understand what type of controls and safety measures are in place to ensure the ALA Foundation is safe and secure. In other words, to make sure the bad guys cannot attack us via the internet or hack into our system and steal our confidential information.

In January, the teams of National Headquarters IT and Risk and Compliance met with the auditors, and we are pleased to report that we are running on high octane racing fuel because the assessment did not expose any high risk items. Yes.

(Applause.)

MS. WESTERGREN: Only 14 moderate risk items were reported, and National Headquarters staff set up a six-month time line to correct them all and we are on pace to have this completed by the close of this administrative year. An IT assessment of this caliber has never been done at the National Headquarters office. The process was very lengthy and very

detailed but absolutely necessary, and in the future, regular participations in these types of assessments will only ensure not only complete stewardship of our members' confidential information but also a proactive willingness to conduct business within the highest level of integrity.

National Vice President Lisa, this concludes my platform remarks.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Great job, Coral. Thank you for stepping in at the sudden loss of Jerry.

The National Secretary operates as the custodian of corporation records with duties such as updating our governing documents and maintaining articles of incorporation. Please welcome National Secretary Coral May Grout.

(Applause.)

(Music.)

MS. GROUT: Good morning, members.

VOICES: Morning.

MS. GROUT: The National Secretary's office interacts in one way or another with every one of our 52 departments throughout the year, whether it involves providing approvals for the use of our emblem or providing information related to proposed changes to our governing documents in a timely manner for all delegates and interested members to read and discuss.

Our National Headquarters staff works tirelessly to meet your needs each and every day. This year, I set my goals with you, our members, in mind. We now have a written job

description with responsibilities to guide each next year's National Secretary and future ones as they continue to work on your behalf.

The emblem process has been revamped somewhat to make approvals much easier, hopefully. To approve the use of our emblem, the National American Legion Judge Advocate needs to allow us to do so because they own our emblem. To accomplish that, anyone responsible for the approval must be trained. That training was held this spring, and it was completed by several members of the National Headquarters staff as well as officers.

With more people trained, we can approve more quickly and if someone leaves, there's someone else who can do the approvals. In the past, there were only two people allowed to approve and both left.

Before I close, I would like to remind all of you how important protecting our emblem is. Please take a look at the slide and notice the difference between approved and unapproved examples. If you see our emblem in advertising or something else and you aren't sure we are a part of that, please let us know. It's impossible for National Headquarters to check every item that comes out in the mail or on social media. You are our eyes. Similarly, you need approval to use the emblem.

It is not necessary to contact us for approval of your stationery, but if you're planning to sell or design pins, shirts, jackets, banners or other items, you need to complete the paperwork prior to undertaking the task. And you also need

approval when you order replacements or additional items. It's easy, it's quick, and it's required.

Madam National Vice President, Lisa, on Vickie's behalf, for inviting me to serve under you as your National Secretary. It has been an amazing opportunity.

(Applause.)

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you, Coral. Our National Headquarters consists of 40 staff members, nine divisions, and is at the center of our mission delivery efforts. I have worked with the National Headquarters for several years as has Vickie, and I am thankful, we are both thankful, for all the great work they do for our organization. Please welcome the lead driver of our mission-driven National Headquarters staff, our Executive Director, Sarah Riegel.

(Applause.)

MS. RIEGEL: All right. The first comment was it was not black. I'm not wearing black for once. Lisa loved it.

Thank you, Madam Vice President. I'm happy to report that this administrative year was filled with lots of positive accomplishments, but first let me say it takes an entire team to help with being a leader. I cannot do it all by myself. Here's where I start singing. All by myself, don't want to be -- all right. Don't invite me to karaoke.

Okay. So let me name a few things. Our National Headquarters divisions collaborated with our national volunteers and leadership to push more information out to members of all

levels using multiple forums: social media, targeted emails -- not advertisements -- updating our web pages versus having PDFs and, of course, quarterly Zoom meetings, zoom, zoom, zoom.

These multi-faceted touch points reached more people which means more people being aware and having access to the updates of information and mission-related activities. And speaking of that, we all heard earlier the registration numbers for our virtual pre-convention committee meetings were phenomenal. More than 2,400 members joined us. With this high number of attending, a new group of our members participated in these national meetings providing that access to what is going on within the national organization.

Another way we reach more people is through upgraded technology. Don't ask me about technology. The Hobart Room, which is located on the first floor at National Headquarters, received enhanced meeting capabilities. We're now able to easily connect to members across the world via more hybrid meetings which also means reducing vendor costs, money management, and lessening the risk of outside data breaches, IT, risk assessment. Okay?

Turning it over to external audiences, we branched out in diverse ways this administrative year. Effective June 17, 2023, the ALA entered into a memorandum of understanding with American Gold Star Mothers, Inc. at the organization's 86th annual national convention in Louisville, Kentucky. The collaboration was a long time in the making and when it

happened, National President Vickie and I were there to sign the document alongside Gold Star Mothers' President Sarah Taylor. The alliance is intended to join compatible missions to elevate the outreach and impact of our organizations.

Also, this summer, we worked with the law firm Bergman and Moore to create -- excuse me, to create an ALA-specific memorandum of understanding. We know our members take care of their veterans. We'll work together to help get the word out so no one else falls victim to predatory law firms attached to the Camp LeJeune water contamination situation.

Our Development Division's first ALA Foundation yard sale this summer was a fun success. Staff members participated in donating items from home to the yard sale held at National Headquarters in Indianapolis. Eight hundred thirty-five dollars raised from the one-day sale was donated to the Mission Endowment Fund - Thinking Outside the Box.

Our branding facelift helped us connect with people who may not have noticed us previously all thanks to a new look from The American Legion last fall. I'm sure you've spotted the word mark all over ALA media, signage, correspondence and many more places. Bringing things back to membership, what a great report we heard on Monday, right? Excuse me, right?

(Applause.)

MS. RIEGEL: Okay. Something else we're excited to see was that a male auxiliary member was recently elected department president in Utah. This is the first time in our

history for this occasion and I'm sure we'll see more pioneers of change again.

Madam President, before I conclude my remarks, I just have to let you know how grateful I am for our National Headquarters staff. They do work hard and put in many hours, a lot of them being after hours and they always remain helpful and dedicated to our mission.

Thank you, Madam President. This concludes my report.

(Applause.)

MS. WILLIAMSON: As a little aside, one of those staff members that works after hours is none other than Sarah. We are very grateful to have her.

It's always quite funny how the Vice President has to take over at this time. Oh, well, it's my turn.

National Constitution and Bylaws Chairman, Diana Sirovina, has been working hard to ensure our governing documents are maintained so that we may easily answer questions about our governance, programs, and eligibility. Please welcome Diana to the stage for her report and the presentation of amendments. Diana?

(Music.)

MS. SIROVINA: Morning.

VOICES: Morning.

MS. SIROVINA: Madam National President, what do your governing documents say? A simple question yet one that was repeated many, many times this past year. Units all over the

country spent countless hours reviewing their governing documents and discussing changes with their members. Many reported there was an assortment of interesting questions that came up in the process.

There seemed to be an abundance of questions regarding elections. Can we change our elections to fall because it's better for our members? Can we elect our officers every two years instead of every year? If we don't change officers, do we still have to have an election? Can we have term limits for officers? And then there were the questions about meetings. Can we hold our meetings someplace other than the Post? Do we have to meet during the summer? Who can cancel our meetings? How many members do we have to have at a meeting to do any business? After all the time spent reviewing and discussing their options, units and departments came to realize the significance of their governing documents.

Then the most important question was asked, how do we change the documents? Through the years, the Constitution and Bylaws Committee has stressed the importance and power of having properly written and regularly reviewed and updated governing documents at all levels of the organization. Keeping our documents up-to-date is the key to a healthy organization that functions as a team to support our veterans, military, and their families.

This year, department chairmen came up with interesting and creative ways to make their members aware of the

importance of well-written and up-to-date documents. The department chair from Florida created a Read Your Constitution and Bylaws challenge. She requested units send in photos of their members working together on their governing documents.

Gift cards for the most creative and best location in their communities were given as prizes. The department chairman from New Jersey held Zoom meetings with unit and county chairman one-on-one to help them review their governing documents. This allowed members the opportunity to get answers to their questions, explanations for those things they might not understand, and even update their documents while still on the Zoom.

North Carolina's chair made it a point to visit many division and district units as she could. Everywhere she went, she took along a display board she created showing the important basics of well-written governing documents.

Under the Big Top was the theme the Chairman from Texas used at her workshop at their fall conference. The committee set up a table with circus decorations and miniature circus animals that were numbered with corresponding questions and answers to help members in updating their Constitution and Bylaws. They gave prizes of popcorn and home-baked cookies.

Even though we didn't have an official "Read your Constitution and Bylaws Day" this year, it didn't stop members from taking that little blue book out for a walk and a photo op. It was a fun way to stress the importance of knowing what is in

the documents we live by in this organization.

While it's great to have a little fun with our program every now and then, we need to remember that our governing documents, regularly reviewed and updated, are essential to our continuing success. It is important that all our members know what is in these documents so when those questions arise, they know where to find the answers.

So, I leave you with that simple question, what do your governing documents say? Madam President, this concludes my platform remarks.

(Applause.)

MS. SIROVINA: We have two proposed amendments this morning, one amendment to the National Bylaws and one amendment to the National Standing Rules.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Before we begin consideration of these amendments, I would like to remind you the delegates of the convention standing rules. Per Standing Rule No. 11, all motions must be presented on a motion form. Forms are located at the elections and tally table at the back of the room where you picked up your key fobs this morning. The debate will be limited to two minutes for each speaker. No person shall speak on the same question more than twice without the consent of the convention.

I remind you we do have a timer here, and she will fairly enforce that rule. The rules also state that during debate, delegates, alternates and guests are to remain seated

within their own delegation or assigned seating area unless they are approaching the microphone, completing a motion form, or exiting or entering the general hall session.

And, finally, Rule No. 10 states that only National committee chairs and voting delegates of the Convention may make motions and address the Convention during debate. Are there any questions? Say no.

VOICES: No.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Are there any questions, seriously?

VOICES: No.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Okay. Diana, would you please proceed with presenting the amendments?

MS. SIROVINA: It is the responsibility of the Constitution and Bylaws Committee to bring all proposed amendments to the floor for deliberation apart from the endorsement status by the Pre-Convention Committee. Therefore, regardless of the Pre-Convention Committee's recommendation on the adoption of the amendments, I will, on behalf of the Constitution and Bylaws Committee, move for the adoption of all amendments.

Remember, all departments and delegates received advanced copies of these amendments. Madam National President, Amendment 1 is to National Standing Rule 2, National Conventions, Section 2. The amendment was presented -- I'm sorry, proposed by the Department of Minnesota.

If adopted, the section reads as follows: National

Standing Rule 2, National Conventions, Section 2.

Representation in the National Convention shall be by departments. Each department shall be entitled to seven delegates and one additional delegate for each 1,200 members or a major fraction thereof whose dues have been received by the National Treasurer 30 days prior to the meeting of said National Convention, and to one alternate for each delegate.

The delegates and alternates shall be selected not less than two weeks before the National Convention, at department conventions or at any manner specified by any department constitution provided that the department hosting the National Convention shall be privileged to hold its department convention and select its delegates at a time and place designated by its department of the American Legion.

In addition to the above, the National President, National Vice President, National Division Vice Presidents, National Chaplain, National Historian, members of the National Executive Committee, and past National Presidents in good standing with their respective units shall be delegates at large with vote to be exercised with their departments except for the National President who shall vote as Chairman of the National Convention.

The Constitution and Bylaws Pre-Convention Committee recommends the amendment be adopted. Madam National President, on behalf of the Constitution and Bylaws Committee, I move the adoption of Standing Rule Amendment 1 as distributed in the

amendment packet.

MS. WILLIAMSON: The question is on the adoption of Standing Rule Amendment No. 1 as distributed. The Constitution and Bylaws Pre-Convention Committee recommends the adoption -- or the amendment be adopted.

Prior to any discussion, can we get the online -- or the on-stage computer onscreen, please? There we go. Is there any discussion? No discussion?

MS. COLSON: Madam President?

MS. WILLIAMSON: We've got someone on the floor. Microphone 2.

MS. COLSON: Thank you. Karina Colson, current NEC from Vermont. Our question for this is when you do your delegates for the National Convention, we currently -- we're at 10 delegates. We ended up with just nine that wanted to attend. We did take one of our alternates and make them a delegate.

So, at this point, if we're increasing the delegate count, does that mean that we're going to have to pay for that many delegates even if we don't get them?

MS. WILLIAMSON: The National Treasurer is nodding her head yes.

MS. COLSON: Thank you very much.

MS. WILLIAMSON: The way I understand this, the way I'm understanding it, it's a matter of moving your alternates up to these chairs. You're still paying for them, correct? It's a matter of moving people up to voting privilege.

Are there any other --

MS. FICKLIN: Microphone 3, Madam Vice President.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Microphone 3?

MS. FICKLIN: Rose Ficklin, Arizona?

MS. WILLIAMSON: Yes, ma'am?

MS. FICKLIN: People don't come to National Convention because they're a delegate. They don't come because they can't afford to come. So changing putting more people having to come is going to put them in a financial hardship.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you, Rose. Microphone 2?

MS. LLOYD: Lauren Lloyd, current NEC for the District of Columbia. Point of clarification, ma'am.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Yes, ma'am.

MS. LLOYD: On the previous question brought by Karina Colson, wouldn't it be only the people who are registered that you would be responsible for paying for as the delegates?

MS. WILLIAMSON: Uh-huh. Right.

MS. LLOYD: Thank you. Thank you for clarifying that.

MS. WILLIAMSON: It looks like someone at 3.

MS. KELLY-PERKINS: Mary Kelly-Perkins, Department of Florida. I think my question was just answered. So if we get 35 delegates and then we get 40 that want to come at time of registration but we only send 30, we're only going to pay for 30, correct?

MS. WILLIAMSON: State that again.

MS. KELLY-PERKINS: Okay. If we get 50 delegates and

we only have 35, we'll just pay for 35 because that's all that would be in attendance?

MS. WILLIAMSON: Yes, that's the way I understand it.

MS. KELLY-PERKINS: Thank you.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Yes.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No. Does that hap --

MS. WILLIAMSON: Hang tight here, we're going to get our National Treasurer up here. She's the money gal.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Hold, please. Camera's back there.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Sorry.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Sorry.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: We just want to --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible) plus --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: We -- no, no. No, you're not.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: We want to be sure we're giving them the right info.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Right, right.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I feel like they're throwing you under the bus but --

MS. REVOIR: No, that has to be a big -- a really big bus. In speaking to the staff just to be sure, if you are afforded -- let's use the number of 20 delegates, you may only have 12 coming but you're going to get a bill for 20 delegates.

MS. KELLY-PERKINS: Thank you.

MS. REVOIR: It's always been that way. That's what they're telling me. You know, I am -- I have to admit I'm new to this job so I am relying on the staff to tell us because I have never read where that is documented.

MS. WILLIAMSON: They're saying that is not the case. Where did she go?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That is the case.

MS. REVOIR: I've never read anywhere where it says that.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible.)

MS. REVOIR: That's true. Okay.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, big steps.

MS. REVOIR: All right. To people that have been the chairman of their delegation -- okay -- you -- if someone -- let's say you have a past national president who's not present. She is a delegate in her own right. You get to vote, your delegation gets to vote her vote. So you're paying for it. You understand? If you're allowed 20, you're allowed 20 votes.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Right.

MS. REVOIR: If she's not there, you vote hers by the consensus of your delegation.

MS. WILLIAMSON: No. Is that not correct?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes, delegate -- past national presidents are delegates are large. They don't have another delegate.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That's correct.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: This is right.

MS. REVOIR: They're the whole number. If that's --
the whole number for the department is 20, then --

(Background conversation.)

MS. JEFFORD: Madam President? Madam President?

MS. WILLIAMSON: Where are you?

MS. JEFFORD: May I (indiscernible) --

MS. WILLIAMSON: Microphone 3. I didn't know what
microphone you were at.

MS. JEFFORD: Ann Fournier from the Department of
Massachusetts has been the department secretary for many years
and she can explain this really well if you would like her to
try.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Please go ahead.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Please let her do it.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Good job, Ann.

MS. FOURNIER: This is after many years of experience
of doing this. When it comes time for us to register our
delegates, we are presented with a bill from National saying you
have X amount of delegates. That may include your -- in our
state, it means we have a National Secretary. We pay her
delegation fee and she's up there with one of our little --

MS. WILLIAMSON: Clickers.

MS. FOURNIER: -- clickers but you must pay for the
original 10 or 20, depending on what you have. You have to

register them. If you only come with eight, you're still going to be billed for those 10.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That is correct.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Okay.

MS. FOURNIER: However, you may have alternates and, as you get here -- which we had this year -- I had to move alternates into the delegation seat right -- and that's how we go. You must pay for those original delegates that you have, whether you send 10 or 20 people.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That's correct. Thank you.

MS. FOURNIER: That's how it goes.

MS. WILLIAMSON: That's the way I understood it, but I haven't served as a department secretary or treasurer to see the back end bill of that --

MS. FOURNIER: Yes.

MS. WILLIAMSON: -- on how that works.

MS. FOURNIER: We get our bill. We must have a seat.

MS. WILLIAMSON: And it may be in that --

MS. FOURNIER: I'm sorry I opened up --

MS. WILLIAMSON: -- fictional department of 20 delegates and only 12 show up, you still vote the other -- you vote as a block --

MS. FOURNIER: Eight.

MS. WILLIAMSON: -- with your others.

MS. FOURNIER: You have to pay for them and you'll get the little do-hickies.

MS. WILLIAMSON: The do-hickies. Okay. I think that clears it up. Lauren, where'd you go?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I have --

MS. FOURNIER: Go ahead.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Lauren, does that clear that up?

MS. LLOYD: No, ma'am. I rise for a request of information, please. Where is it written that this is the policy for registration and for delegates? I understand I heard Tamara come out and say that this is how it's been and Ann also confirmed that this is how it's been, but I want to know so I can go back to my department and show them in the standing rules or somewhere where it's written.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Hold, please.

MS. LLOYD: Thank you.

(Members confer.)

MS. WILLIAMSON: Okay. We found it.

VOICES: Woo.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you. In your standing rules right about in the same area we're proposing to change, Section 2, National Convention, but at the last -- or second to the last paragraph, "The vote of any delegate absent and not represented by an alternate may be cast by the majority of the delegates present in the absent delegate's department."

MS. LLOYD: Madam Vice President?

MS. TRAM: Madam President? Microphone 4.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Yes, ma'am. Please.

MS. TRAM: Thank you. Norma Tram, Department of Minnesota. Two things. First of all, I believe it's \$35 that we pay per delegate, correct?

VOICES: Yes.

MS. TRAM: So \$35 per delegate. Minnesota proposed this amendment and our reasoning wasn't for Minnesota. We thought of the entire American Legion Auxiliary. We felt that everyone deserves more delegates.

In the last 20 years, we've lost half of our delegate strength and what this does, it's preventing our younger members, our newer members, from coming and being a delegate and sitting in these chairs so that they too can experience this amazing thing that we do every year. And we get to talk and we get to vote, and what we do is we send all those that have been coming for years but we don't have room anymore for those new members.

So we want this to happen so we can increase our membership because, as you all know, once you come, you want to continue. Once you hear all these amazing things that we do, you want to be part of that. We want our younger members to come be part of that, go home and say to their friends join the Auxiliary, look at the amazing things that we do as American Legion Auxiliary members. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you, Microphone 4. Let's go over to Microphone 1, please.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay.

MR. RASMUSSEN: Mike Rasmussen, Department of Utah President.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Yes, sir.

MR. RASMUSSEN: With respect to what Minnesota just said, that's a Minnesota issue, not a national issue. If --

MS. WILLIAMSON: Oh, yeah.

MR. RASMUSSEN: Just listen to what I'm saying because I am new to the American Legion Auxiliary. Okay? If you want to provide more leadership or different leadership, then train them up and let some of the other people that have your delegates turn them over. That is not a -- and dilute -- we have problems in many of the western states of getting all of our delegates to convention because of the cost of going to convention.

If I could drive four or five hours down the road and just go to convention and have any problems, but we had three last year go to Wisconsin. Reason I didn't go, cost-related, travel-related. If you want to make the best use of your delegates, that's up to everybody else's delegations. It's not a national issue. It's a "Hey, we're going to use our state delegates in the way that we best can. We have a hard time finding delegates to come to convention."

So in the case of many of these larger states where you have alternates that are teeming to try to get in, great. That's a great problem to have. We don't have that problem in

the State of Utah, we are trying to just try to grab some people and grab our share.

So with respect to a lot of these other departments, this is a contrary view and a respectful view of what else is available. Thank you very much.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you for your -- Microphone 3. Microphone 3.

MS. MCCLOUD: Department of Connecticut.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Your name?

MS. MCCLOUD: Jennifer McCloud --

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you.

MS. MCCLOUD: -- incoming president. We at our -- this year's department convention, the Department of Connecticut voted and ratified that we fully support this decision so that we could have the opportunity to bring more people to convention.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you.

MS. MCCLOUD: Thank you.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Let's go to Microphone 2. Jane?

MS. Hardacre Thank you. Jane Hardacre, Department of Florida. This is for clarification. After speaking with Lauren in D.C., I think what she is trying to ask is if this passes and D.C. is allowed 10 delegates, to make up a number, she is asking do they have to register all 10 because it's the registration that is the cost, correct?

MS. WILLIAMSON: Yes.

MS. Hardacre: So she has -- they have to register all 10?

MS. WILLIAMSON: Not all 10 will attend, I understand. They may not be able to get 10 to show but they will be obligated to -- for payment --

MS. Hardacre To register the new number.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Correct.

MS. Hardacre That's what she was asking.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Correct.

MS. Hardacre: She wants to know as a smaller department -- oh, yup.

MS. LLOYD: Okay. Thank you. That was -- that last part was what I was asking. So what I'm asking for clarification of -- and I think it's wonderful that -- if we increase the number and we get more opportunities for people to come, but the burden on some of the smaller departments --

MS. WILLIAMSON: Uh-huh.

MS. LLOYD: -- might be a little bit hard. So what I'm asking is if you are saying that we are going to be increased to 10 delegates or whatever --

MS. WILLIAMSON: Or whatever that number is.

MS. LLOYD: -- and we only register five people, are we responsible for 10 registrations?

MS. WILLIAMSON: Yes.

MS. LLOYD: Okay. So we're clear on that --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: To vote.

MS. LLOYD: -- but I need to know where that is written so I can take that back to my department, please.

MS. WILLIAMSON: I just read it.

MS. LLOYD: She did? That didn't pertain to the actual registration costs. I just want clarification. Thank you.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Okay. Some more. This is in the bylaws. Article VI under National Convention, Section 8, "A quorum shall exist at National Convention when 60 percent of departments are representing by having paid their National Convention registration fees."

When it comes to showing you any documentation on how much those fees are and -- that is something that your department secretary will submit, your delegates. Your department secretary does your paperwork on your delegates, your alternates, determining who's going. She's the one who submits it to the National organization.

(Members confer.)

MS. LLOYD: Yeah. Okay. Maybe this will clarify my question.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Also, it's in Section 7, each -- it's tied to, "Each delegate shall be entitled to one vote. The vote of any delegate absent and not represented may be cast with the majority of delegates from that department." The manner of casting the ballots was determined in our convention standing rules. So it's all tied together.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Excuse me.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Hang on a second, Sue. Trish.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Madam President --

MS. WILLIAMSON: I'm sorry, Microphone 4. Sorry, I thought Trish was there.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: She was. She threw me in front of her. Point of order --

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So, the rules state you could only speak once --

MS. WILLIAMSON: Yes.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: -- before --

MS. WILLIAMSON: Yes, that was it.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: -- in respect to over there, she has spoken three times before (indiscernible).

MS. WILLIAMSON: Yes.

MS. WARD: Madam National Vice President, Trish Ward, delegate from the Department of Kansas.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Yes.

MS. WARD: I speak in favor of this amendment.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you.

MS. WARD: The Department of Kansas also voted at convention to endorse this amendment. Over the years, I walk into the convention hall and first my heart breaks because I see how fewer and fewer and fewer chairs are here. So this gives us an opportunity as we all are going to build membership plus

having more delegates here to have people come here, see the great work we do, and fill these delegation halls like we used to because having delegates at 714, it wasn't that long ago it was over 800.

So this is an opportunity as we build membership to bring more delegates to this convention. I strongly encourage this amendment and I urge you to vote for its passage. Thank you.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you. Let's go to Microphone 1.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Hello. My name's Virginia. I'm from the State of Utah and I call for a vote.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. WILLIAMSON: We need a second.

VOICES: I second.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Okay. Get out your keypads. This requires a two-thirds vote to call for the question.

So the question, and the question has been called for -- let me get to the right page here to end the debate. So all in favor of ending the debate, press 1 on your keypad. Those opposed, press the number 2 key. Please vote now.

(Music.)

MS. WILLIAMSON: Do I hear that you say that it's not working? Mine isn't either. Hang tight. Let's try this again.

Let me see, they're not ready

-- they're not quite ready. Give -- they've got to get it set

in the back. But it did end the debate right now.

Oh no, that would be Sarah. Talk amongst yourself.

(Members confer.)

MS. WILLIAMSON: Where's Mary Davis? Mary Davis does that little cutesy stand up and stretch and --

(Pause.)

MS. WILLIAMSON: Okay. Right, because that would be within their own department. We're not governing what the departments do.

Mary. Mary. At Microphone 4? If everybody wants to stand up?

VOICES: Yeah.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Do a little stand up?

MS. DAVIS: Are you ready?

MS. WILLIAMSON: Look at the screens. It'll help stretch.

MS. DAVIS: Ready, girls? Hands up. Wrists together. A-rishta-ca-rishta-ca-rishta-ca-ca. Hands up. Wrists together. Elbows together. A-rishta-ca-rishta-ca-rishta-ca-ca. Hands up. Wrists together. Elbows together. Elbows together. Knees together. A-rishta-ca-rishta-ca-rishta-ca-ca. Hands up. Wrists together. Elbows together. Knees together. Hip out. A-rishta-ca-rishta-ca-rishta-ca-ca.

One more. Hands up. Wrists together. Elbows together. Knees together. Hip out. Thumb out. A-rishta-ca-rishta-ca-rishta-ca-ca.

(Applause.)

MS. DAVIS: Good job.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Well, that was a nice little stretch, huh? Put a little levity into a serious subject. Ready? Okay. Everybody have their keypads? Are you ready for the question again to end debate?

VOICES: Yes.

MS. WILLIAMSON: All those in favor, please press the number 1 and those oppose, press 2. Please vote now.

(Music.)

MS. WILLIAMSON: Nice. And the results.

(Applause.)

MS. WILLIAMSON: I think that we reached our two-thirds majority, don't you? Okay. So let's go back. Are you ready for the question, the original question?

VOICES: Yeah.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Okay. All those in favor of Standing Rules Amendment No. 1 press No. 1 on your voting keypad. Those opposed, press 2. Please vote now.

(Music.)

MS. WILLIAMSON: Done. Please show the results. Yes. The vote is 525 in the affirmative and 166 in the negative. The affirmative has it and the amendment has been adopted. The governing documents are now amended.

Diana, please continue and please take your time.

MS. SIROVINA: Okay. I will. Madam National

President, Amendment 2 to Bylaws Article IX, Unit Organization, Section 2. The amendment was proposed by the National Constitution and Bylaws Committee. If adopted, the section will read as follows: Bylaws, Article IX, Unit Organization Section 2, the minimum number of members to charter a new unit shall be 10 senior members with the exception of the Department Headquarters Unit that shall have no minimum membership requirement.

The Constitution and Bylaws Pre-Convention Committee recommends the amendment be adopted. Madam National President, on behalf of the Constitution and Bylaws Committee, I move the adoption of Bylaws Amendment 2 as distributed in the amendment packet.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Again, can we have the on-line computer put on the screen, so everybody sees what we're -- the amendment is? The question is on the adoption of the Bylaws Amendment No. 2 as distributed. The Constitution and Bylaws Pre-Convention Committee recommends the amendment be adopted. Is there any discussion? Is there any discussion? No one coming to the microphones? Microphone No. 4, please.

MS. ROBINSON: Carol T. Robinson, the Department of Ohio.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Carol?

MS. ROBINSON: Clarification, please.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Sorry.

MS. ROBINSON: This amendment is only for clarifying

the wording to add to charter a new unit. I'm just asking for clarification.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Correct.

MS. ROBINSON: Okay.

MS. WILLIAMSON: To charter, not to maintain. Are there any other questions? Microphone 1. Microphone 1, please.

MS. SMITH: Tracy Smith, Department of Oklahoma.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Tracy?

MS. SMITH: I'm reading in Article 9, Unit Organization, where it says Section 2, "the minimum membership of a unit shall be 10 senior members with the exception of a Department Headquarters Unit that shall have no minimum membership requirement." Clarification, will that change to where it says no minimum membership?

MS. WILLIAMSON: The way I understand that, if this passes, if this is adopted, it will be brought before the post-NEC meeting.

MS. SMITH: Thank you. Oh, is she quoting from the Bylaw? You were -- I thought you were -- Article 9, Unit Organization, Section 2, it says "The minimum membership of a unit shall be 10 senior members with the exception of a Department Headquarters Unit that shall have no minimum membership requirement." So will that be removed to say no minimum membership of a unit or will -- because -- am I reading that incorrectly? I'm reading that that says you have to have a

--

MS. WILLIAMSON: Can you put back the online -- or the on-stage -- there we go. There we go.

MS. SMITH: Because we're only -- looks like we're only changing to charter.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Correct. So it's -- we had this discussion, I think, in the meeting also. Yes. That's what -- scoot it over so that we can see the first -- we're going to move it over so you could see how it is now. Correct. The minimum number shall be 10 senior members with the exception of the headquarters unit. So it -- what we are changing is to charter. Now, is this -- this is the article you were speaking of, correct?

MS. SMITH: That is correct.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Yes, that's exactly -- we're looking -- this is how it's written out in the first column and then if adopted, this is how it will read.

MS. SMITH: So there will be no mandatory minimum of 10 members to contain --

MS. WILLIAMSON: To maintain.

MS. SMITH: -- to maintain a unit?

MS. WILLIAMSON: No.

MS. SMITH: Thank you.

MS. WILLIAMSON: It will simply be to charter.

MW. SMITH: Thank you.

MS. WILLIAMSON: From the national perspective.

Departments can do what they wish. Microphone 2.

MS. CHAPLIN: Thank you. Lisa Chaplin, Department of Virginia.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you, Lisa.

MS. CHAPLIN: To clarify, if there is no minimum, then a unit can be carried with zero members or one member only.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Again, that would be up to your department on how your department wanted to remove someone's charter or remove a unit's charter.

MS. CHAPLIN: And follow-up, would that not be in conflict with the National Constitution And Bylaws?

MS. WILLIAMSON: I'm sorry? Not if this is adopted, no. Uh-uh.

MS. CHAPLIN: Thank you.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Uh-huh. Let's go to Microphone 3. Try to be fair and share the wealth here.

MS. WARD: Thank you. Pat Ward, South Carolina.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Pat.

MS. WARD: My question is how our requirements are going to be for membership each year. We have to send in our goal for each unit. So if it's chartered with 10, is that number going to stay at 10 so that if they drop down to four members, that's going to hurt our percentage?

MS. WILLIAMSON: Your department establishes those goals for individual units.

MS. WARD: Okay. It's just -- so we --

MS. WILLIAMSON: National establishes the goal for a

department.

MS. WARD: Right.

MS. WILLIAMSON: So how you distribute that within your department would be on the department's decision.

MS. WARD: Okay. Thank you so much.

MS. WILLIAMSON: There's someone on Microphone 4? Can't quite see. Ohio sign's in your way.

MS. CRAFT: I'm not surprised. Hello. Rose Craft, Department of South Dakota.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Go ahead, Rose.

MS. CRAFT: I would like to make this just a little clarification and I'm speaking in favor of this. In rural America, we have many small units that are very close to each other, and when I say close to each other, I really mean less than five miles away from each other. As time as passed, some of these units have dropped to nine, eight, seven members; however, they continue to work the mission in their community. When we make it mandatory that they have to have 10, you're asking the departments to ask them for their charters --

MS. WILLIAMSON: Uh-huh.

MS. CRAFT: -- and by doing this, by passing this amendment, once they have been chartered, if the charter has to be 10, they may continue and you hope they grow but as our units are so close together and aging, it is to the benefit of the departments to have this freedom to be less than 10.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you, Rose. Let's go back over

to Microphone 1.

MS. MORRIS: Glynis Morris, Department of Nevada --

MS. WILLIAMSON: Yes, ma'am.

MS. MORRIS: -- speaking on the amendment. My understanding is this is now going to fall onto the departments. If a department has a unit that only has three people, a president, a secretary, and a treasurer, that is still a viable unit and the department makes the decision as to whether or not those three members are enough. Because my understanding in talking to some of the other constituents and delegates here, there are departments that are automatically shutting down units the minute they fall below 10. They're not giving them the opportunity to have a revitalization team go in and help build them back up again. They're not giving them the opportunity to say hey, what was the issue why you lost so many of your members. This will allow us, as a department, to go in and work on what we say we're going to help lift them up instead of shutting them down.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you, Glynis. Microphone 2.

MS. DIAZ: Sue Diaz from Alaska. This is only for National saying we need 10 members to get a charter. Each department can decide how many members makes a charter afterwards. So, if I get -- I have 10, I got my charter, I lose five, I don't lose my charter --

MS. WILLIAMSON: Correct.

MS. DIAZ: -- or if your department says well, you

have to have 10 people, then I lose my charter, but they're actually giving the departments the freedom of figuring out how they run their departments.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Yes. Thank you, Sue. Microphone No. 3? Deb?

MS. KNICKERBOCKER: Deborah Knickerbocker, Department of Connecticut. My understanding is that this is just a clarifying statement and I believe that it is not a clarifying statement. I believe it is going to change that section. So our department is not in favor of this because it is not a clarifying statement.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you, Deb. Anyone over there at 4? I can't quite see. Microphone 1?

MS. BROWN-PARK: Nancy Brown-Park, Department of California, past National President, and I do speak in favor but to try to clarify, if you received -- and I think we did -- the post -- for your post-NEC, that does clarify it. There is an amendment to remove that Rule 10 unit -- I'm sorry --

MS. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

MS. BROWN-PARK: -- Standing Rule 10, 9 that -- to remove that.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Right.

MS. BROWN-PARK: So that's gone. It will be --

MS. WILLIAMSON: Correct.

MS. BROWN-PARK: It takes away that requirement for the 10 senior members.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Correct and that will be something that would be acted upon at the post-national Executive Committee meeting should this be adopted.

MS. BROWN-PARK: Right, right, and to speak in favor, we had the National Commander here that said we need to work with those small posts and units and that -- this allows you to do that.

(Applause.)

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you, Nancy. Microphone 2, please.

MS. HALL: Madam Vice President --

MS. WILLIAMSON: Yes. Sue --

MS. HALL: Susan Hall, Department of Georgia. Call for the question.

(Applause.)

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you very much. Is there a second for that?

VOICES: Second.

MS. WILLIAMSON: We need to vote again, and it requires a two-thirds vote. So, pull out your keypads. Staff, are we ready back there?

So, we will vote on -- the question is to end debate. All those in favor, press No. 1 on your keypad. Those opposed, press 2, and you may vote now.

(Music.)

MS. WILLIAMSON: Again, that requires a two-thirds

vote. Please show the results.

(Applause.)

MS. WILLIAMSON: Okay. Who are those 12? So now we will go back to the original question. The question is on the adoption of the Bylaws Amendment No. 2 as distributed and discussed. Are you ready for the question?

VOICES: Yes.

MS. WILLIAMSON: All those in favor of the Bylaws Amendment No. 2, press the No. 1 on your voting keypad. All opposed press 2, and please vote now.

(Music.)

MS. WILLIAMSON: And this also requires a two-thirds vote. Please show the results.

(Applause.)

MS. WILLIAMSON: And I think we are -- that this also has passed. It will -- and the governing documents are amended, and everybody has voted -- well, not everybody, majority in the affirmative.

Diana, please continue.

MS. SIROVINA: Madam President, this concludes my report.

(Applause.)

MS. SIROVINA: Thank you to all of the delegates for your participation and your vote.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you, Diana. Thank you and thank you, everyone. Thank you for all your hard work and

paying attention and your flexibility in allowing us to look up all those answers that you had questions on.

Is Vickie back? Would the National Secretary please give us some convention updates? Coral?

(Music.)

MS. GROUT: Okay. There is still a chance to win a PUFL membership at the ALA luncheon. Don't miss your chance. The luncheon starts promptly at 12:30 p.m. at the Hilton Charlotte Uptown Piedmont Ballroom. That's not here, it's at the Hilton.

The National Commander's banquet is this evening at 6:30 p.m. in the Crown Ballroom of the Convention Center. If you haven't already, please make sure to swing by the Wall of Heroes on your way out of today's session. Bidding for the state's dinner silent auction is now open. Check out the how-to flyer on your chair for instructions.

The 2023/2024 National Education Committee will meet in the far-left corner immediately following today's session with Star Purnell. The Department of Nevada has two tickets for the state's dinner. If you want them, find Glynis Morris over there somewhere.

The mailroom. They're asking departments to please pick up your mail. If you haven't found them yet, it's Room 213E and the Lost and Found is starting to grow. We have an iPhone. Woo.

VOICES: Woo.

MS. GROUT: They will keep it backstage after the session and please claim it as soon as possible. If you don't come by and get it, you've got to go to Lost and Found to get it. Those are the announcements.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you, Coral. I would like to -- a quick little announcement. Immediately after the luncheon, all the 2022/'23 national officers as well as the potential '23/'24 national officers and those others that are participating in the installation ceremony, we're going to come back to this hall for a rehearsal and I'm shooting about 2 o'clock. Okay? And there'll be a full rehearsal.

Department presidents that were here yesterday, I thank you very much for your time yesterday. You're excused from this one.

VOICES: Yay.

MS. WILLIAMSON: And for that, since we have a lot of work tomorrow, we are adjourned until 8:00 a.m. tomorrow. Thank you very much.

(Whereupon, at 11:16 a.m. on August 29, 2023, ALA Nation Convention Session II was concluded.)

<u>Minutes Approval Committee</u>	<u>Date Approved</u>
Barbara White (AZ)	June 3, 2024
Sharon Spiker (KS)	June 3, 2024
Vicki Ozenbaugh (NE)	June 3, 2024

2023 NATIONAL CONVENTION MISSION DRIVEN
AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY
102ND NATIONAL CONVENTION



WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 30, 2023

NATIONAL CONVENTION SESSION III

Charlotte Convention Center
Hall C1
Exhibit Level

8:00 A.M. TO 10:15 A.M.

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AUTOMATED GREETING: Welcome to day 3 of Mission Driven, the 2023 American Legion Auxiliary National Convention.

Here to begin this session is your National President, Vickie Koutz.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Good morning, American Legion Auxiliary.

(A chorus of good morning)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Are you ready to start your engines for another eventful session? I call this meeting to order.

Karen Peel, would you please lead us in our invocation?

MS. PEEL: Mother Theresa says people are often unreasonable and self-centered; forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of having ulterior motives; be kind anyway.

If you are honest, people may cheat you; be honest anyway.

If you find happiness, people may be jealous; be happy anyway.

The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow; do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have and it may never be enough but give your best anyway.

For you see, in the end, it was between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.

Please bow your heads and pray with me.

Dear Heavenly Father, we come to You on this last day of convention, grateful for all that has transpired for our beloved organization. Today, Father, let us hear Your lovingkindness this morning as we trust You. Teach us the way we should walk for You to lift up our souls.

We are thankful for our president, Vickie, for her service and dedication. On this day, we ask You to bless her and assure her that everything You have asked her to do, she has done. We look for Your guidance on this convention day. May our hearts and minds be filled with Your presence and Your spirit. In all things, may we give You the glory. In Your most Holy Name, we pray. Amen.

(Amen)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you, Karen.

And thank you to our Past National Presidents for arriving early this morning to greet our attendees. Was that fun?

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The first item of business is the nomination of national officers for the 2023-2024 administrative year. Representatives making the nominations as well as the candidates are seated on the stage. Coral May Grout, national secretary, will read the rules governing nominations and elections.

MS. GROUT: Number 21. Nomination of national officers shall be made from the floor.

Number 22. Nominating speeches shall be limited to two minutes for each candidate except for the National President candidate. She will be allowed four minutes. There shall be no seconding speeches.

Number 23. Following nominating speeches for national officers, each of the nominees for National President, National Vice President, and National Historian, and National Chaplain shall be introduced to the assembly by the Auxiliary member making her nomination. Said introduction to be only by name and department affiliation. And in response to the introduction, the nominee for office shall be allowed a maximum of two minutes for remarks.

Number 24. Election of national officers shall be

held on Wednesday. When there is but one candidate for any office, the nominee may be elected by voice. When there is more than one candidate for a national office, the election shall be by paper or electronic ballot as determined by the presiding officer. A majority of votes cast shall elect each officer. When no candidate receives a majority of votes on the first ballot, a second ballot will be taken between the candidates receiving the two highest numbers of votes with the candidate receiving the most votes on the second ballot being elected.

Madam National President, that completes the reading of the nomination and the election rules.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Nominations are now in order for the office of National President. The national secretary will call the departments with announced candidates.

MS. GROUT: The Department of Alaska has an announced candidate for the office of National President. The delegation chairman should ask the chair to recognize the delegate for the purpose of a nomination.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The chair recognizes the delegate from Alaska for the purpose of a nomination.

MS. ROBINSON: Madam President, microphone 2.

MS. KOUTZ: Yes. Ann Robinson, delegation chairman

from the Department of Alaska, I request that you recognize the member from Alaska.

MS. ROBINSON: While driving under the caution flag, Mother Nature threw up the red flag. So, we are going to give Daniele a green flag so her mother can reach the finish line.

MS. TARJOMAN: Madam National President, American Legion Auxiliary delegates, what an honor it is to be up here today. I tried my hardest to get myself and my family to Charlotte for this amazing moment, but Idalia had other plans.

My name is Daniele Tarjoman and I am Lisa Williamson's daughter. Because of my mom's influence, I was proudly raised in the American Legion Junior Auxiliary. Today I stand before you with immense pride and admiration to nominate a truly remarkable woman for the esteemed position of National President of the American Legion Auxiliary.

This nomination is not just a formality but a heartfelt recognition of the unwavering dedication and selflessness that my mother has displayed throughout her 33-year journey with the Legion family and as a life member of C. Russell Huber Unit 57 in Fairbanks, Alaska. She obtained her eligibility through my brother, Kyle Parkerson, for service in the Alaska Air guard where he continues to serve as staff

sergeant at Eielson Air Force Base. She is also eligible through her service of her adoptive father, Keith LaChance.

Our family is her pride and joy. Her husband, Darrell, my bother, Kyle, as well as me, and that pride is also reflected in the commitment to the American Legion family as we have all served in leadership roles at local, state and national levels.

My husband and I have blessed my mom with two grandsons, Dawson and Micah. Lisa's stepfather, Dave, and both her brothers, Robert and Jacob, as well as their spouses and children, are integral parts of her life and, of course, are all Legion family members. Unfortunately, her mother, Judy, could not be here today. We all know she's very, very proud of my mom looking down from heaven.

Some of you may not know this but my mom worked for the American Legions Department of Alaska for about a decade. Prior to that, if you had asked her if she saw herself taking on this role, she would have disagreed. Service to our veterans, our military and their families has become a way of life for her since then. I have known her no other way.

My mother's commitment to serving others is unparalleled. From the moment she joined the American Legion

Auxiliary, she embraced its mission wholeheartedly dedicating countless hours to supporting our veterans and their families. Her compassion knows no bounds and she has touched the lives of so many with her kindness and unwavering support.

What sets my mother apart is her ability to connect with people on a deep and personal level to the genuine understanding of the challenges faced by our veterans and their families and she has made it her mission to be their voice and advocate for their needs. Her empathy and compassion have provided solace and comfort for those who felt forgotten or overlooked.

But it's not just her compassion that makes her an exceptional candidate for National President. My mother possesses remarkable leadership skills that have been honed through the years of experience and dedication. She has a unique ability to inspire and motivate others by bringing out the best in everyone around her. I have witnessed firsthand the countless hours my mother has spent working tirelessly (indiscernible) the lives of our veterans. She has spearheaded initiatives that have made a tangible difference from providing essential resources to advocating for those changes to benefit our heroes. Her determination and unwavering spirit have been a

source of inspiration for me and for all those who have had the privilege to work alongside her.

As National President, I have no doubt that my mother will continue to lead with the same passion, dedication, and love that she has shown throughout her journey with the American Legion Auxiliary. She will be a beacon of hope, a voice for the voiceless and a tireless advocate for our veterans and their families. I know she will be the one.

You will be the perfect one, Mom.

On behalf of the Department of Alaska, it is with great honor and pride that I nominate my mother for the position of National President of the American Legion Auxiliary 2023 to 2024. Her unwavering commitment, compassionate heart and exceptional leadership make her the perfect candidate to lead this organization into a future filled with hope, unity and continued service.

Thank you.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Lisa Williamson is nominated.

Are there any further nominations for the office of National President?

Hearing none, nominations for National President are

closed.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Nominations are in order for the office of National Vice President. The National Secretary will call departments with announced candidates.

MS. GROUT: The Department of Kansas has an announced candidate. The delegation chairman should ask the chair to recognize the delegate for the purpose of a nomination.

MS. PATREL: Madam President, microphone number 4.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The chair recognizes the delegate from Kansas for the purpose of making a nomination.

MS. PATREL: Marcia Patrel (ph), delegation chairman from the Department of Kansas, I request that you recognize the delegate from Kansas that is on stage for the purpose of a nomination.

MS. KOUTZ: The chair recognizes the delegate from Kansas for the purpose of making a nomination.

MS. CINDY WARD: Good morning, Madam President and distinguished guests and American Legion Auxiliary members. I am Cindy Ward, a member of the Department of Kansas, and I am honored to nominate my mother, Trish Ward, for the position of American Legion Auxiliary National Vice President.

Trish is a 26-year paid-for-life member of the John P. Hand, Unit 250, Louisburg, Kansas. She obtained her eligibility through World War II service of her father, John Purcetti (ph), who has served in the Army, and her grandfather, Edmond Lindburgh (ph), a navy Seabee.

The Ward family includes a blended group of children, grandchildren and great grandchildren who are all members of the American Legion Family. Trish's husband, Steve, is the light of her life and together they share volunteerism and traveling with interest to the American Legion family events.

In 2011, Trish served as NEC and was a National Membership Chairman. She has held nine national chairman positions and served as Central Division national vice president. Trish is a chartered member of the ALA Foundation and served on the strategic planning committee.

It is my honor and a privilege on behalf of the Department of Kansas to nominate my mother, Patricia Trish Ward, for the office of national vice president of the American Legion Auxiliary for the year 2023-2024.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Trish Ward is nominated. Are there any further nominations for the office of National Vice

President?

Hearing none, nominations for national vice president are closed. Congratulations.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Nominations are now in order for the office of National Chaplain. The National Secretary will call the departments with announced candidates.

MS. GROUT: The Department of South Carolina has an announced candidate. The Delegation Chairman should ask the chair to recognize the delegate for the purpose of a nomination.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The chair recognizes the delegate from South Carolina for the purpose of making a nomination.

MS. WINESETT: Microphone 3, Madam President.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Microphone 3.

MS. WINESETT: Louise Winesett, Past Department President and current secretary for the Department of South Carolina.

I request permission for Pat Ward, president of the Department of South Carolina, to approach the podium for the purpose of nomination of the National Chaplain.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: So, granted.

MS. PAT WARD: Good morning. Madam National President

Vickie, my name is Pat Ward. I'm outgoing president of the Department of South Carolina. On behalf of the Department of South Carolina, I proudly present Brenda Collins as a candidate for the position of National Chaplain.

Brenda is eligible through the service of her husband, John, who is a veteran of the Vietnam era. Brenda is a proud 23-year PUFL member of the James F. Daniel, Jr., post 3, in Greenville, South Carolina. She served as Department President in 2009-10, as NEC from 2010, 2011, Alternate NEC from 2011 to 2012. Her national appointments include Southern Division Children and Youth Chairman for two years; Junior Activities Committee Member; Poppy Chairman; AEF Chairman; Leadership Chairman; National Security Chairman; Leadership Chairman and National Convention Credentials Chairman for this convention. She also served as National Historian during the period of 2018-2019.

Brenda's immediate family consists of two sons and daughters-in-law and four grandchildren, all members of the American Legion family. She is a retired administrative assistant for the pastor of her church. Brenda has volunteered at Richard M. Campbell Nursing Home entertaining the residents there for over 19 years.

I am honored to place before you Brenda Collins from the Department of South Carolina as a candidate for National Chaplain 2023-2024.

Thank you.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Brenda Collins is nominated. Are there any further nominations for the office of National Chaplain?

Coral?

MS. GROUT: The Department of Hawaii has an announced candidate. The delegate should ask the chair to recognize the delegate for the purpose of a nomination.

MS. WALLACE: Madam President?

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Microphone 4.

MS. WALLACE: Eva Wallace, Western Division National Vice President standing in for the Delegation Chairman. I am a delegate to the convention. I request that you recognize the delegate, Nancy Brown-Park, who is on stage for the purpose of nomination.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you. So granted. Nancy?

MS. BROWN-PARK: Madam National President, American Legion Auxiliary members, I am past National President, Nancy

Brown-Park, and I am honored to nominate Brister Thomas for the position of American Legion Auxiliary national chaplain for 2023-2024.

Although many of you may not know this, like Brister, I, too, lived in Hawaii for many years. I know firsthand the aloha compassionate spirit and deep faith that the people of Hawaii hold dear. And this fully represents Brister and her dedication to service.

As an American Legion Auxiliary member, she has achieved so much. Revitalizing Hawaii Girl State, serving as department president and NEC. But that just briefly touches the surface of Brister's accomplishments. As a native Mississippi, Brister is a retired police chaplain and served as an associate pastor and youth director for the church. As a military wife, she was the site lead for military transition families and was a U.S. Navy ombudsman to assist and advise military families.

Brister's dedication can be summed up in his most recent experience. She missed a critical pre-convention meeting to this convention. Why did she miss the meeting? She was busy searching for shelter and beds for the people of Lahaina who lost everything in the fires. It's just what Brister does. She sees a need and then jumps to help and find a solution. Her

service to others never stops.

Brister is a PUFL member of E Unit 56, the Department of Hawaii. She is eligible for the American Legion Auxiliary through her father, a Vietnam War Marine pilot, and her husband, Mark, a retired Naval diving officer. Together, she and Mark have three beautiful daughters, all members of the American Legion Auxiliary.

It is my distinct honor to nominate Brister Thomas for the position of American Legion Auxiliary National Chaplain. On behalf of the Aloha State of Hawaii, we ask for your support of Brister Thomas.

Thank you.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Brister Thomas is nominated. Are there any further nominations for the office of National Chaplain.

Hearing none, nominations for National Chaplain are closed. Nominations are now in order for the office of National Historian. The National Secretary will call the departments with announced candidates.

MS. GROUT: The Department of Kentucky has an announced candidate. The Delegation Chairman should ask the

chair to recognize the delegate for the purpose of a nomination.

MS. ROBEY: Madam President, microphone 4.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Microphone 4.

MS. ROBEY: I'm Bonita Robey, NEC from Department of Kentucky, and I request your permission for our delegate on stage, Virginia Hobbs, for the purpose of a nomination.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: So, granted. Virginia?

MS. HOBBS: Madam National President, delegates and members, it is my honor to nominate Donna Thurman of the Department of Kentucky for National Historian.

Donna is a 27-year PUFL member, eligible through the Korean and Vietnam era service of her late father, Kenneth Johnson, and her late husband, J.W. Thurman, a decorated Vietnam veteran.

Donna experienced the hardship of military lifgene. She felt the disruption of living with grandparents when her father was overseas and in changing schools for her senior year when her father retired.

As a military spouse, Donna received experience, the stress to a family when the veteran becomes disabled. For over 10 years, she was the principal caregiver for her husband, J.W., who was 100 percent disabled and passed in 2015. She

understands that history is a verbal representation of the plans and achievements of the year. She knows that the National Historian writes a comprehensive document of facts and achievements, not a travel log.

Donna served as Department President in 2015-16 and as NEC, an alternate, in addition to six national appointments and as the Resolutions Chairman for the 2021 National Convention.

During her services at all levels, Donna has successfully fulfilled those duties. She will succeed as National Historian by fulfilling the responsibilities of this office, sharing information, insight and dedication. Donna will use the skills she learned in her college studies and her four years teaching English and foreign language to compile a comprehensive history.

It is my privilege to nominate Donna Thurman for National Historian for the 2023-2024 administrative year. We appreciate your support.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Donna Thurman is nominated. Are there any further nominations for the office of National Historian?

MS. GROUT: The Department of New York has an

announced candidate. The Delegation Chairman should ask the chair to recognize the delegate for the purpose of a nomination.

MS. MACINNIS: Madam President, microphone 4.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Microphone 4.

MS. MACINNIS: Cathleen MacInnis, delegate from the Department of New York. I ask that you recognize our Delegation Chairman, Nancy Babis, who is on the platform for the purposes of a nomination.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: So, granted. Nancy?

MS. BABIS: Madam President Vickie, delegation all, my name is Nancy Babis and I'm the outgoing president of the Department of New York.

The Department of New York proudly brings forward the name of Yvonne Brunner for the high office of National Historian for the 2023-2024 year.

Yvonne's journey within the American Legion Auxiliary has provided her with the opportunity to serve as a historian of the unit, the county and department levels. Additionally, she has served two years as a member of the National Historian committee.

As part of her tenure as the Department of New York Historian, she sought to encourage members to tell their past

tory as an Auxiliary member. Social media was utilized to promote a member spotlight which highlighted individual efforts emphasizing "Your Story is Our History". This initiative gained national recognition at last year's National Convention.

The second social media engagement focused on honoring the legionnaire who gave our members eligibility into the Auxiliary. The "Why We Do What We Do: My Hero Tribute" gave members the opportunity to pay tribute to their loved one's service.

As a candidate for the office of National Historian, I am sure Yvonne has many more ideas to engage and encourage our members to preserve our legacy. Your consideration for her in this high office is greatly appreciated by the Department of New York.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Yvonne Brunner is nominated. Are there any further nominations for the office of National Historian?

Hearing none, nominations for National Historian are closed.

With these nominations and the nominations made during the division caucuses on Saturday, August 26, 2023, nominations

for the 2023-2024 national offices are completed.

The convention rules provide that the nominees for the offices of National President, National Vice President, National Chaplain, National Historian shall be introduced to the assembly. The Auxiliary member who made the nomination will introduce the candidate by name and department affiliation only. Each nominee will be allowed a maximum of two minutes for remarks.

Will the representative from Alaska please introduce the candidate for National President?

MS. ROBINSON: Ann Robinson, Department of Alaska. I would like to introduce Lisa Williamson for nomination for the National President.

(Applause)

MS. WILLIAMSON: Good morning. First of all, I want to thank the staff for making sure that my daughter could nominate me. We were worried about the weather down there in Tampa, whether she was going to have internet, whether she was going to have power. And they actually pulled some strings. I also need to thank The Legion. We didn't have enough bandwidth down here to be able to pull that off so The Legion loaned us some Wi-Fi for an hour just so that my daughter could come in

and nominate me.

(Applause)

MS. WILLIAMSON: So sincere thanks to our American Legion and that's what family does, isn't it? So -- and, of course, staff because they've bent over backwards for that one. I was a little freaky.

Sincere thanks goes to the entire Alaska Legion Family, of course, over here. Some of you in the back.

(Applause)

MS. WILLIAMSON: And, of course, I would be remis if I didn't mention C. Russell Huber, Unit 57, and our entire Legion Family back at home who are streaming this for always supporting me and always having my back. I'm truly honored and humbled. And to legion family throughout the country, I want to thank those who have supported me throughout the years. I'm truly appreciative.

I thank my husband, Darrel, for his constant support, his ear and his shoulder. He has dealt with the highs and the lows of this journey. Always, I love you and thank you.

I'm grateful that both my children were here in one form or another as well as my stepson, Darrel's son, Nick. All three grew up in this organization, so their presence here today

shows that I truly believe my family is near and dear to my heart and that belief mirrors my conviction to our American Legion Family.

Other members of my family have traveled far and wide to be here today. And I will, should I be honored to be elected as your National President, introduce you to them later today. My heart is truly full.

I'd simply like to conclude this with this thought by Maya Angelou:

"My mission in life is not merely to survive but to thrive and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor and some style."

Thank you all.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Will the representative from Kansas please present the candidate for National Vice President?

MS. CINDY WARD: The Department of Kansas would like to introduce Trish Ward for National Vice President.

(Applause)

MS. TRISH WARD: I would first like to extend deep thanks and gratitude to John P. Hand, Unit 250, in Louisburg, Kansas and to the Department of Kansas American Legion Family

for their support. The Kansas American Legion Family accepted me into their ranks in 1999, and I am forever grateful to them for their friendship, giving my life purpose and showing me what being an American Legion Family member is really all about.

But it doesn't stop with Kansas. To the entire American Legion family across the country and our foreign units, thank you for your support throughout my journey in leadership and on behalf of those we serve. I am forever grateful and truly humbled. I will strive to make you proud and represent you with dignity and grace always.

A special thank you to my wonderful husband, Steve, who joins me as a family in our commitment to the ideas and principles of the American Legion. Through thick and thin, I am so fortunate to have such a loving, wise and kind man support me in everything I do. Even the crazy ideas, like tie-dyeing over 100 red, white and blue t-shirts for my project.

A special thanks to my beautiful mom, who at 95 years young, is forever a voice of reason, my biggest supporter and my number one cheerleader. She and my dad believed in giving back to others. And I thank them both for instilling in me the importance of volunteering and of serving others with a good and compassionate heart.

I leave you with one of my favorite quotes as shared by Oprah Winfrey: "Follow your passion; it will lead to your purpose." Serving our nation's heroes through our mission and organization is my life's work, passion and purpose. Under Lisa's leadership and guidance, the future looks bright for the American Legion Auxiliary, and I would be honored to support her and our members on this great journey of "Service Not Self" and as your vice president.

I leave you with one final thought, a question that has been asked of you this past week and I will now answer yes, I am ready.

Thank you.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Will the representative from South Carolina present the candidate for National Chaplain?

MS. PAT WARD: I am proud to present Brenda W. Collins as candidate for National Chaplain from South Carolina. Thank you.

(Applause)

MS. COLLINS: Thank you, Pat.

Madam President Vickie, being a country girl and the youngest of 14 children of a devout Christian family, I remember

every night as a child before bed, my parents would get down on their knees and they would pray. They'd pray for family, for friends and always for our country. Those prayers sustained me for a while but would not carry me. I needed my own prayers.

After marrying my husband, John, we recorded eight southern Gospel albums, we traveled through 26 eastern and southern states singing and ministering in churches, auditoriums and in outdoor arenas.

Later, the Lord opened the doors for me to travel and speak to ladies' groups and to volunteer at Richard Campbell Veterans Nursing Home. During this time, I realized prayer is one of the most important things in our lives. Prayer helps us in our everyday life. People often ask for prayer. For instance, if they needed prayer, they would ask. If they didn't need it, they would not ever ask. If someone asked you for a prayer, pray for them. Don't say I will and then maybe forget. Say the prayer just then. It never hurts to ask God to bless them to answer their prayer. To simply ask God to touch their body or bless them.

I pray for the ALA every day and I thank you for allowing me to speak. It would be an honor to serve the national organization as National Chaplain 2023-2024. Thank

you.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Will the representative for Hawaii present the candidate for National Chaplain?

MS. BROWN-PARK: Brister Thomas from the Aloha state, Hawaii.

(Applause)

MS. THOMAS: Aloha. Thank you, Madam President and distinguished members of the American Legion Auxiliary and esteemed guests.

Thank you, Eva, our Western Division National Vice President and Past National President, Nancy, for that incredibly humbling nomination.

There's a special phrase that lives in my heart every day and I thought it might also touch yours. And it's especially relevant this morning since receiving this flower leigh from my daughters in Hawaii. Like a leigh, we are all connected. A leigh is made up of different types of flowers and once intertwined, they find strength and beauty in their common goal.

Much like the Auxiliary, we are all individuals connected by this wonderful organization. And like a lei we are

all connected.

Aloha. My name is Brister. I am from Hawaii, and I am your candidate for the position of National Chaplain. Brister is a family name. It's been passed down for many generations, and a simple way to remember it is combining brother and sister for Brister.

As a military child, I was born in Mississippi. I attended schools in California, North Carolina, Virginia, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. My husband, Mark, an Ohio legionnaire, and I settled in Hawaii serving the military and raising our three incredible daughters, who are all proud members of the Auxiliary.

I am a chaplain with over 30 years' experience as a youth pastor, an associate minister. I am also a retired police chaplain, a military spouse, a military transitioning counselor and a volunteer with countless hours.

Together, like a leigh, as your National Chaplain, I will continue to foster an environment of unity ensuring that the American Legion Auxiliary remains a beacon of strength, of hope and of inspiration.

For these reasons and more and with lots of aloha, I ask for your vote for the position of National Chaplain.

Thank you.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Will the representative from Kentucky present the candidate for National Historian?

MS. HOBBS: Madam President, delegates, it is a pleasure to introduce to you Donna Thurman, candidate for National Historian.

MS. THURMAN: Thank you, Ginnie. Once a teacher, always a teacher.

As she just announced, my name is Donna Thurman and I'm from the Department of Kentucky living in Florida in the hurricane zone at this time. So please think about all of our Florida gals -- and men. Sorry.

Before moving to Florida a couple of years ago, my brother gave me a cardboard box filled with memorabilia from my great-grandmother. About a month ago, I found it, and I spent the afternoon going through it. Among the items were two things of interest from my grandmother. One was a photo album. I flipped for about two hours going through this photo album, pictures from the 1930s and '40s. I was fascinated with the pictures, and I wondered who these people are. What are they doing? There were names written below it. No explanation of

who they were. There were places written below it. Just a few places that I have been. My grandmother was from New York.

Hello, New York.

At any rate, the next thing that I found was a diary written by my 11-year-old mother who passed away at the age of 39 when I was 13. You know, I learned more from that diary than I did from any of those pictures. It told me about her going to school in a one-room schoolhouse in Hoosick, New York. And more about 1939-40, about her friends and her dreams and her hopes for the future. Those words explained more about life during that year than any photo ever could. And that reinforced my desire to be your historian.

I would like to be the artist to paint this year's history of the American Legion Auxiliary with vibrant words.

Thank you for your time and consideration. And thank you, Madam President Vickie.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Will the representative from New York present the candidate for National Historian?

MS. BABIS: The Department of New York proudly presents Yvonne Brunner for the mighty job of historian of the national organization.

MS. BRUNNDER: Good morning, everyone.

(Applause)

MS. BRUNNER: Good morning, Madam President.

As historians, we are the gatekeepers of our legacy. Through written and photographic storytelling, we don't only showcase the mission of our organization. We are also providing guidance to our members on how we have accomplished our goal.

As your National Historian, I will refresh your knowledge on the tools required for a dynamic accounting of your story. We will engage in conversations highlighting how to begin writing a unit's history. We will discuss the pros and cons of a written or a digital history book. We will explore what's the best way for you to record your events, whether it's by strictly a written history or a pictorial with captions or perhaps it's finding more creative ways to enhance your scrapbook.

As your National Historian, I will place great emphasis and value on member engagement. With the use of social media, together we will have many conversations of shared ideas and tips that will benefit all of us.

As I have said before, your story is our history. So, let's make history together.

Thank you so much.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: This concludes the nominations for the 2023-2024 national offices. We will now proceed with the election of national officers.

You have nominated Lisa Williams (sic) of Alaska for the office of National President. In accordance with the rules, you have adopted, if there is but one candidate for an office, the nominee will be elected by voice.

All in favor of electing Lisa Williamson as the National President for 2023-2024 administrative year, please aye.

ALL VOICES: Aye.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Oppose, no?

The chair declares Lisa Williamson of Alaska newly elected --

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: -- as the National President for the 2023-2024 administrative year.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Lisa?

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Trish Ward of Kansas is the only nominee for the office of National Vice President. All in favor of Trish Ward for the office of National Vice President, please say aye.

ALL VOICES: Aye.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Oppose, no?

Trish Ward has been duly elected as the National Vice President for the 2023-2024 administrative year. Trish, please stand.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: On Saturday, August 26, 2023 at the division caucuses, each division nominated a candidate for National Division Vice President. And the current Division National Vice Presidents have certified to the chair the following nominees:

Carol T. Robinson has been nominated for the office of National Central Division Vice President. All those in favor of Carol T. Robinson as National Central Division Vice President, please say aye.

ALL VOICES: Aye.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Oppose, no?

Carol T. Robinson has been duly elected as the

National Central Division Vice President.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Debra Tiernan has been nominated for the office of National Eastern Division Vice President. All those in favor of Debra Tiernan for National Eastern Division Vice President, please say aye.

ALL VOICES: Aye.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Oppose, no?

You have elected Debra Tiernan as National Eastern Division Vice President. Debra, please stand.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Karen Susag has been nominated for the office of National Northwestern Division Vice President. All those in favor of Karen Susag National Northwestern Division Vice President, please say aye.

ALL VOICES: Aye.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: All oppose, no?

You have elected Karen Susag as the National Northwestern Division Vice President.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Christine Trahan has been nominated for the office of National Southern Division Vice President.

All those in favor of Christine Trahan as the National Southern Division Vice President, please say aye.

ALL VOICES: Aye.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Oppose, no?

Christine Trahan has been elected the National Southern Division Vice President.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Jeanette Cushing has been nominated for the office of National Western Division Vice President. All those in favor of Jeanette Cushing as the National Western Division Vice President, please say aye.

ALL VOICES: Aye.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Oppose, no.

Jeanette Cushing has been elected the National Western Division Vice President.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: For the election of National Chaplain, we will be voting with our electronic keypads. The nominees are Brenda Collins and Brister Thomas. If you would like to vote for Brenda Collins, press 1. If you would like to vote for Brister Thomas, press 2. Please vote now.

(Music plays)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Voting is now closed. Please show the results.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Brister Thomas has been duly elected as National Chaplain for the 2023-2024 administrative year. Please stand, Brister.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: For the election of National Historian, we will be voting with our electronic keypads. The nominees are Donna Thurman and Yvonne Brunner. If you would like to vote for Donna Thurman, press 1. If you would like to vote for Yvonne Brunner, press 2. Please vote now.

(Music plays)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Voting is now closed. Please show the results.

Donna Thurman has been duly elected as National Chaplain (sic) for the 2023-2024 administrative year. Please stand, Donna.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Historian. I'm sorry. Donna Thurman has been duly elected as the National Historian for the 2023-2024 administrative year. Please stand, Donna. Sorry

about that.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you your 2023-2024 American Legion Auxiliary national officers.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you, ladies. And a big thank you to the entire elections and tally committee. These women are here early in the morning distributing keypads and they stay late every afternoon collecting them after the sessions. Please help me give these women a round of applause.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Our election judge, Claudia Goodin, Official Jackie Bowen, Official Ann Crawford, Official Doreen Gallagher, Official Mindy Rue, Official Sue Verville, Official Linda Workman, Official Deb Albers and Official Jill Layton.

Let's watch a video as we clear the stage and prepare for the next segment.

(Video played)

"Remarkable work happens here fueled by brain power and a desire to help families. There will be 80,000 missing American service members from World War I, Korea, Vietnam and other wars.

"Guys like Gerald Clayton and Louis Tushla, Nebraskans who joined the Navy in the late 1930s. Both were on the USS Oklahoma during the attack on Pearl Harbor. Like most of the 400 plus on board who died that day, their identified remains ended up in mass graves in Hawaii.

CARRIE BROWN: "It's our nation's greatest promise to those who serve and their families to say you have put your life on the line by stepping into those boots. And we are here for you. And we will come and find you no matter how long it takes, no matter how hard it is, and we will bring you home."

"That's the mission of the Department of Defense POW/MIA accounting agency. It has two labs in the country. One is in an Offutt Air Force Base building that was once a World War II bomber factor. DPAA is the largest employer of forensic anthropologists in the world. Staff also include dental experts, data scientists, historians and others, almost all with advanced degrees.

"This is 50 percent science, 50 percent detective work, 50 percent something else.

"What did Willie Wonka say?" Yeah. It's all science. You know, detective -- it is the science on the detective work."

"Research and recovery come first. A team excavating

the site of a plane crash or with the USS Oklahoma disinterring remains from graves. Then the remains arrive here. One of the next steps is laying out bones on tables for analysis. Out of respect, we don't show bones of actual service members."

"Hi Katie."

KATIE EAST: "Hi there. We'll start with the cranium, actually. If you want to place that in the ring there."

NARRATOR: "Katie East gave us a good idea of how this works using a teaching skeleton."

"So would this be a fairly typical sample that you might have coming in a lab?"

KATIE EAST: "Yes. It can be. Very often, we'll only get parts of skeletons, depending on where the remains come from."

NARRATOR: "Making sure bones fit together or articulate so they know it's a single individual."

KATIE EAST: "And this is a nice articulation here. So after we have a single skeleton ready for analysis, essentially, what we'll do is start building a biological profile. Take measurements that can help us do the analyses and then we'll assess things like sex, age, height and then look for anything like injuries or signs of disease."

NARRATOR: "Skull and pelvis assessment helps determine sex."

KATIE EAST: "So we'll look here in this area. That's glabella. It's larger in males than it is in females."

NARRATOR: "Looking at the surface of the joint connecting two pubic bones helps determine age."

KATIE EAST: "And that will degrade over time as you get older, unfortunately. And we have some references that tell us sort of the pattern of decline."

NARRATOR: "Abnormalities provide clues that could connect the skeleton to a medical record, like indication of an earlier in-life injury."

KATIE EAST: "But the fact that we're missing a big chunk of bone here and that we have some speckling and the perforation here, we believe that there was an injury."

"So, a broken ankle maybe?"

KATIE EAST: "Probably. Something like that."

NARRATOR: "Other anthropologists are doing this work on real cases done in the blind, meaning they don't know much about the case."

LARKIN KENNEDY: "We want to try our best to limit as much bias as an analyst may have in their assessment."

NARRATOR: "Larkin Kennedy sorts through bits of a wool blanket that covered a service member in their casket."

"So, in order to make sure that there's no small pieces of evidence or small teeth or anything like that that might be something we associated with an individual. So we have to pick through all of that.

KATIE WITMORE: "One thing that's really interesting about these remains is that they are all black, as you can see. A. so you can get different color scheming from different tectonic processes or you can also get it from things that happened around the time of death like burning. So, if you're, for example, in a plane crash or something like that, you could have (indiscernible) burning on both as well."

KATLYN STYLES: "And in this case, there are no duplicated or overlapping bones. However, there are some differences in the skeleton that may suggest that this is actually more than one person. For instance, the left leg is in general much shorter than the right leg. It's amazing that every single skeleton's a little bit different. Everybody has something strange about them or something interesting about them, honestly."

NARRATOR: DNA is a key tool especially with a sample

from a family member for comparison."

KATLYN STYLES: "And we take DNA for two reasons. One is to, again, make sure that all of the elements go together. And then the other one, of course, is to help with identification."

NARRATOR: "Items found at a site or in a casket are examined in the material evidence lab."

KATLYN STYLES: "This looks like possibly part of a boot. He's got like a rubber sole or insole."

NARRATOR: "And this looks like part of a zipper."

KATLYN STYLES: "So zippers could have come from basically anything. It could be the uniform. It could be gear that they were wearing. It could be from the plane itself."

NARRATOR: "A 1929 coin helps date an event. The prescription of these glasses could match medical records. Watches, buttons, rings provide more clues."

KATLYN STYLES: "Most of the evidence that we get is sort of supporting. You know, it says we are in the right place. We're in the right time period."

NARRATOR: "Multiple lines of evidence are needed to confirm the identity of the missing service member. A DPAA medical examiner makes the final decision."

LARKIN KENNEDY: "Every case is unique in its own way. Some present their own challenges. We've been able to make an identification that is fast, in six days. That is not the norm. That's when everything lines up and -- or it could take years."

NARRATOR: "USS Oklahoma case work began in 2015 with 13,000 bones from 388 unidentified sailors and marines mixed in more than 60 caskets."

CARRIE LAGARDE: "When the project started, it was the primary thing being done in this laboratory. So every table had Oklahoma skeletal remains."

"Welcome to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency ceremony."

NARRATORY: "After more than five years, the Offutt lab is on track to identify more than 90 percent of the men who died on the USS Oklahoma."

"I would like to take this time to welcome the family members of the USS Oklahoma sailors and marines who are present with us today. They are the families of Fireman First Class Louis James Tushla and Storekeeper Second Class Gerald Lee Clayton."

(Applause)

"It's like a closure. It's like we're representing

our family who waited so long for word of him and it's like a closure now."

NARRATOR: "Identified remains are returned to hometown cemeteries or back to Hawaii for burial with a marker, a name and those scientist detectives who made it happen watching."

"It gives us that opportunity to step back, look at the big picture and the effect that this has on ourselves and everyone, family members, other people within the organization. And it makes it special."

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: That's amazing, isn't it?

It is our duty to ensure legislators are thinking about the challenges that face our military and their families, both while deployed and when they return. Here to share the accomplishments of the legislative committee, please welcome national vice chairman, Julia Moore.

(Music played)

(Applause)

MS. MOORE: President Harry S. Truman said in an address to the armed forces of 1945, "Our debt to the heroic men and valiant women in the service of our country can never be

repaid. They have earned our undying gratitude."

Those words ring as true today as they did 78 years ago. That is why the American Legion Auxiliary legislative program provides and assistance to American Legion Auxiliary members, to advocate for the legislative agenda of American Legion.

This administrative year started with the 117th Congress learning the American Legion's legislative agenda and is currently in the 118th Congress agenda. The American Legion's positions represent the views of the membership and shape the organization's legislative priorities.

The Legion family voice serves nearly 1.6 million U.S. military veterans and service members. As advocates for our veterans and their families, it is our job to educate, inform and encourage the support of our congressional representative.

The Vote of Voice, calculated over 21.9 million messages, were sent to our elected officials. 3.4 million were added as new clients. And 350 million sent emails to our advocates. Each of our grassroot members are proud of those numbers.

Advocates from the Legion family advocated for our veterans and their families via many acts as shown in the next

few photos. You were a force not to be reckoned with in the passing of Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson honoring our promise to address comprehensive toxics, the PAC Act of 2022. The passage of this legislation now provides delivery of comprehensive benefits to all generations of veterans who have suffered from exposure to pits and other toxic substances. This legislation was made in honor of Heath Robinson, a Central Ohio veteran who was deployed to Kosovo and Iraq with the Ohio National Guard and passed away in 2020 from cancer.

You wrote letters and made calls. You prepared information boards for conferences and public areas. You gathered signatures on petitions for the 11 legislative positions on the agenda. And last but certainly not least, you started a Hill. It is because of the grassroots members of this great organization that our veterans legislative issues and priorities are being heard loud and clear through our community and faith in this great nation.

Keep up the good work. We are not done. We have only begun and we will not quit until all Legion's legislative priorities on the agenda have been considered and passed for the sake of our veterans and their families.

It is essential for the success of the legislative

program that we continue to reach out to our communities, friends and Legion family and especially our elected officials. We must continue to advocate for our veterans, militaries and their families. Remember to educate patiently, advocate passionately and inspire consistently.

Thank you. Madam President, this concludes my opening remarks.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The public relations committee works to show the world who we are, what we do and why we matter. Effective PR can strengthen our identity, build brand awareness, and ultimately attract new members. To share the committee's accomplishments, please welcome national public relations chairman, Norma Tramm. Norma?

(Music played)

MS. TRAMM: Madam National President, Mark Twain said, and I quote, "Many a small thing has been made large by the right kind of advertising."

The public relations programs in our units are key to how the public views our organization. We continue to say that we are the best kept secret as many do not know about our mission or how to join our membership. You are the most

important advocate for the American Legion Auxiliary. When you are branded, you represent the organization. People who do not know what we are all about will view you and every member as the American Legion Auxiliary, who we are, what we do and why we matter. We all have the opportunity to share our mission.

Here are some of the ways that units let their communities know about the American Legion Auxiliary.

American Legion Auxiliary Unit 1980, Woodland Park, Colorado, presented the good deed award to Eva and Mina Achord for their work to take care of evacuated animals during a wildfire. They made sure that the animals had food and water. The award was presented at school on the last day and was given a two-and-a-half-minute spot on the local station. It was very clear that this award was from the American Legion Auxiliary.

David McNeil Unit 129 of Iowa hosts legislative copies. On the first Saturday of each month during the Iowa legislative sessions, these copies are open to the public which is advertised in the newspaper for two weeks prior to the copies. Senator Kevin Alons and Representative Ken Carlson attended the session and each have an opportunity to open with remarks. Once that is completed, they open the floor for questions from the citizens in attendance. Following the

meeting, a picture and article are published in the paper so that all citizens can be informed.

American Legion Unit 490 participated in gathering and delivering Valentine cards to veterans at Richard A. Anderson Texas State Veterans Home. The veterans were blessed with the adorable granddaughter of Chaplain Tommy as she shared the Valentine cards. Social media was used to make the public aware of the mission of the American Legion Auxiliary.

Carol, a member of Unit 360, Waverly, Pennsylvania, found a great way to share our mission with the public. She wrote a letter to the editor thanking the faithful supporters who generously donated to the various events of the unit. She also shared that the mission of the American Legion Auxiliary is to provide support and encouragement to all veterans and their families.

Did you notice the different ways that the public became aware of the mission of the American Legion Auxiliary? Remember, social media is a great tool when the information is current, and the site is maintained. It will then build up every program as the public will be able to find needed information. If we do public relations correctly, we will enhance all the other programs. Others will want to join as

members and assist with the mission of American Legion Auxiliary.

Madam National President, this concludes my platform remarks.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The pandemic has reminded us just how fast disaster can strike causing lives to be forever changed. It is in our most challenging times that we are so grateful for the generosity and support of others. The Auxiliary Emergency Fund is so important because it's a perfect example of members directly supporting members.

Here with more on our Auxiliary Emergency Fund is national chairman, Kelly Elliott. Kelly?

(Music played)

MS. ELLIOTT: National President Vickie, members and guests, this year was truly the year of members helping members. We introduced our beautiful new AEF pin that individuals could receive by donating \$100 or more to the AEF fund. For the fiscal year 2022-2023, there were \$213,942.54 of AEF dollars awarded. Total number of members awarded was 150. Total awarded disaster applications were 111 totaling \$156,032. Total awarded temporary assistance applications was 39 totaling

\$57,910.54. Total contributions collected, \$213,248.18.

(Applause)

MS. ELLIOTT: In March, at the mid-winter NEC meeting, it was proposed that we increase the grants from \$2,400 to \$3,000. The NEC voted in favor and now eligible members can receive up to \$3,000 in assistance.

(Applause)

MS. ELLIOTT: This year we saw many storms hit our southern division mostly. They started off with Hurricane Ian hitting Puerto Rico and then taking a direct hit at Florida. It then continued up the coast. The stories coming out of the area were devastating. The hurricanes had destroyed homes, businesses, roads and entire towns.

Our members stepped right up helping other members. Members helping members. They started checking on others to see what they needed and what they could do to help. Then they helped them start to rebuild their homes and their lives. There were many post-homes that were destroyed, and everything was lost. Our national staff was ready. When the AEF applications started coming in, the members were assured that they would process them as quickly as possible. Getting those much needed funds to our members is always the goal.

There were over 80 grants awarded in Florida alone. They reported over 1200 members working for the AEF program and helping their members. Members helping members.

Our members did a wonderful job raising funds to donate to the AEF and reporting that what they had done to raise those funds. And here are a few of those stories.

For many years now, Department of Colorado, Unit 1, has hosted an annual Mardi Gras benefit with Cajun food, a King cake, silent auction and lots of fun. This year, they raised \$3,306.36.

(Applause)

MS. ELLIOTT: It looks like they really know how to have fun.

The Department of Delaware, Unit 28, held their 10th Cavalcade of Stars night. Tina Washington was the emcee for the night. They had several acts consisting of soloists, group singers, comedians, ventriloquists and comedy skits. They served dinner and then the show began.

Each year, they have a different theme fundraiser, and they include the whole Legion family. The department that night raised \$2,820.

(Applause)

MS. ELLIOTT: Congratulations.

The Department of Minnesota held an annual silent auction at their fall conference. Several items were donated to the auction including a collection of decanters from past national conventions, quilts, baked goods and many more items. One unit donated a bamboo rake with scratch-off tickets taped to the prongs. They spent \$100 on that project but that project brought in a bit of \$225. With the help of Auxiliary members, they were able to raise \$5,093. That is fantastic.

(Applause)

MS. ELLIOTT: The Department of Pennsylvania -- they held a raffle at their fall conference. They raffled a Flanders-filled blanket. And then at their spring conference, they raffled off a Preamble blanket. Great ideas, ladies! All the proceeds went to the AEF fund. Many members made donations in honor of or in memory of a recipient. The Department set a goal of raising \$15,000 for the AEF program. They were able to exceed that goal and raised \$16,902.

(Applause)

MS. ELLIOTT: Great job, Pennsylvania.
Congratulations for exceeding your goal.

This year has been a busy year for Auxiliary Emergency

Fund and in true form, our members stepped up and continued to support the AEF. Members helping members.

Madam President, this concludes my platform remarks.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Chaplains provide spiritual and emotional guidance often in times when many of us feel lost. They are compassionate listeners who always bring dignity and love to every situation. Please welcome National Chaplain, Karen Peel, here to present the National Chaplain report.

(Music played)

MS. PEEL: Loud music.

President Vickie, I am very humbled to serve with the most resolute department chaplain, Sue Scherer (ph). The honor and respect through which they perform their duties has been a great inspiration to me.

Thousands of cards were sent to our veterans, military and families for holidays, thinking of you, sympathy, birthdays, get well. And the departments included their juniors to make up, create these cards for all these occasions. Visits were made to shut-ins, hospitals, nursing homes and VA facilities.

Special services were donned for holidays, 9/11, Veterans Day, for chaplains in any time that they were called

upon. The Department of Colorado's chaplain, Judy Sadler, held a chaplains retreat "Blessed are the Peacemakers". The retreat includes inspirational speakers. The invocation was given by Caroline Smith, the American Legion Auxiliary junior chaplain. Isn't she adorable?

A table of goodies and gifts to assist the chaplain with their duties was available for all the attendees to choose from. There were also some gifts for all of the presenters. Judy said that the event was a great success. They plan to do it again next year and I hope that other departments will consider this worthwhile event.

The Department of Indiana's chaplain, Tana Shepherd, sent out a department prayer chain monthly to her members who requested to be included. The prayer chain includes a list of members who have passed and prayer requests. The prayer chain also included a Bible verse, a prayer, a Pulham (ph) or an inspirational thought. On the department website, there was a Chaplains Corner that included a prayer or a devotion. Our chaplains have truly been busy this year.

We mourn the loss of our many members throughout our beloved organization. We continue to pray for them, their families and friends as they continue to go through the grieving

process. Prayer is so powerful.

I hope that you will join me to continue to pray for our members, our veterans, military and their families. It doesn't matter if you know them personally or not. Just pray. They will feel your prayer and it will lift their spirits.

Thank you for all that you have done for our members, veterans and military. You have blessed so many this year. Being the spiritual leader of your unit or your department is such a humbling and rewarding experience. I am forever grateful to serve as your National Chaplain.

Madam President Vickie, this concludes my platform remarks. However, I have a presentation.

President Vickie, this is your prayerbook and it represents all the thoughts, prayers, quotes from the members of our organization. So I hope when you get a little down time --

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Soon, yeah.

MS. PEEL: -- you will enjoy. It will bring you many days and hours of pleasure.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: I can't wait. Thank you. Let's get a picture.

MS. PEEL: Okay.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

MS. PEEL: Okay. One last thing. Madam President, we have a special guest.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Okay.

MS. PEEL: Our special guest this morning is Lou Cavalier, U.S. Navy retired and vice chairman of the Chapel of Four Chaplains.

(Applause)

(Music played)

MR. CAVALIER: Greetings to all of you from the Chapel of Four Chaplains in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I'm joined up here on the stage with Jane Gobley (ph) from New Jersey, Corinna Colson from Vermont, and you'll find out why, and also John Brouse (ph) and his service dog, Serg, also from New Jersey.

So New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Vermont, we've got you covered. But this is for everybody. The Chapel of Four Chaplains is in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. We invite all of you to come and pay us a visit. And we appreciate, we really appreciate the support that we get from all of the different posts of the Auxiliary all throughout the country because without that financial support, we cannot carry on our mission.

And I want to show you just one simple little mission

that involves Corinna at the Department of Vermont that happened just this past year. So in Gilman, Vermont, there's a Methodist church that has been empty for 12 years. And the Methodist governing council has deemed it ready for closure. But what makes this church so noteworthy is that it was the church for Chaplain George Fox. Now George Fox was one of the four chaplains. He was actually in World War I as a medic and then after World War I when World War II -- well, he went back to Vermont. He actually became the state chaplain for the Department of Vermont in the American Legion. And then when World War II came around, he enlisted as a chaplain. He met up with the four chaplains at the Harvard Divinity school, went on to Dorchester and from there, they all made history.

So this chapel is very, very important not only to the state of Vermont but to the entire American Legion family. And I'm happy to say that in last year and up until this year, Corinna led the charge with the American Legion Post 47 in Northland, Vermont -- in Canaan, Vermont, rather and the Moore Fox American Legion Post 41 in Gilman. And what they did was they had to initiate a capital campaign to buy the chapel instead of it being sold to a developer. We all know where that's going to go.

So they had a capital campaign. We heard about this at national headquarters in Philadelphia. We joined with them in the capital campaign and we helped them raise \$30,000 that they needed to buy that chapel.

(Applause)

MR. CAVALIER: Not only that, but they exceeded that amount by a significant number and then only exceed it more today because I'm presenting Corinna right now with an additional check for \$7500.

(Applause)

MR. CAVALIER: So we want to congratulate the folks up in Vermont. But really, this is something that you all have done because the culture here at the American Legion Auxiliary convention is one that I really enjoy. It's a lot more upbeat than the folks on the other side.

(Laughter)

MR. CAVALIER: I wonder why. But your national commander or your National President sets the tone. And the thing that I was most impressed was the emphasis on family.

Now, you know, when people come to us for help at the Chapel of Four Chaplains for a multitude of reasons, it's usually not the service member who comes. It's usually somebody

from the family who's dealing with the issues. And that's how it starts. And that's how we get that service man or woman involved whether they need VA help or chaplains' help or whatever it is, we help them get into the program that they need.

And I want to say that, Vickie, you have an amazing job in a year. It only takes a year but a year goes by fast. And you have done very, very well. And we are going to present Vickie now with the Legion of Honor of the Chapel of Four Chaplains.

(Applause)

MR. CAVALIER: So as we say in the military, attention to orders, please stand.

You guys are just as bad as the ones over in the other hall.

(Laughter)

MR. CAVALIER: The Chapel of Four Chaplains is pleased to present the Legion of Honor bronze medallion to national Auxiliary president, Vickie Koutz, for her service as the National President for this past year. In recognition for her lifetime service to all people regardless of race or faith, this award symbolizes for all of us and for all Americans the unity

of this nation founded upon the Fatherhood of one God. Hereby presented. Congratulations. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you so much.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

MR. CAVALIER: And thank you all very much and we will see you in Philadelphia.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Our National Historian strives to preserve, display and share our history, traditions and milestones. These efforts allow members the opportunity to look back and reconnect with our organization's rich past. Here to tell us more is National Historian, Laura Susie Clyde.

Susie?

(Music played)

MS. CLYDE: Good morning. Madam President, national officers, delegates, alternates and guests. It's been a privilege this year to serve as the National Historian to this great organization.

I could tell you it's been a learning experience to deal with all of these different personalities. Anyway, I did

learn that our history, where it stands with departments -- and I am so sorry to say that we really need to bring history back to an importance for this organization.

Our race began on September of 2022 and it started by finding the contact information for 52 drivers for the race. As the trials began, we found out that we only had 49 drivers. Our drivers of the cars would be our Historians. Their crew chiefs would be the Presidents of the Departments. The pit crews would be the Department Leadership, the units and the members of those Departments. They would also be divided into five geographical groups. And the judges for those groups would be the divisional vice presidents.

As the drivers of the pit crews showed up at the track for race day, we found out that many of the drivers of the pit crews were a little confused as to what they were supposed to do during the race. So, we tried to get as much information out to them as we could so that they could help the drivers get across the finish line.

Our judges did the best they could do to encourage the crews to help the drivers finish the finish line. But unfortunately -- but unfortunately, all but eight cars didn't make it past the first pit stop. When they had to take an

extended time to the pits because the pit crews forgot to give their drivers the instructions that they were given by the president of the track when she came through and talked to all the pit crews.

As the race went on, the yellow flag came out. All but 19 of the drivers went to the pits because they had not filled out their forms for the end of the race. Fortunately, there were four cars that finished the race and the divisional race. And they were Elizabeth Hallene from Massachusetts --

(Applause)

MS. CLYDE: -- Margaret Keller from Minnesota --

(Applause)

MS. CLYDE: -- Debra Lee Shuffett from Kentucky.

(Applause)

MS. CLYDE: And the winner of this year's race and the winner of this year's Toomey award is Tracy Kinnick from Rose Hill, Kansas.

(Applause)

MS. CLYDE: So before I go on to finish my story, I would like to say for those future historians, when all of you go back to your Departments, get in contact with your leadership. Your members get in contact with your historians.

And throughout the year, make sure that you tell her, send her notes, send her emails, give her a call, and let her know of special things that you've been doing, your unit's been doing, your division's been doing or things you're doing on the department level. Give her as much information as you can possibly give her so that when she gets ready to write her year-end report, she can decide what all needs to go into that history to turn in a book for the National Historian -- through the National Historian. She needs to send it to her Divisional Vice Presidents, they judge, it goes to the Historian.

If they don't have information, they can't write a book. So it's up to all of you to make sure that your Department Historians get the information they need to write the book for your Department so people in the future know what we did and why we did it and how important it was.

Thank you. It's been a wonderful year. God bless you all. Madam President, this concludes my platform remarks.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: I am pleased to introduce the members of the dedicated resolutions committee: Lisa Chaplin, chairman; Dorothy Hazen, vice-chairman; and Roseann Dziegłowicz, member.

(Applause)

MS. CHAPLIN: Thank you, Madam President.

We have three courtesy resolutions and I will now read the first one:

"WHEREAS, Amwins has been and remains a faithful partner to the American Legion Auxiliary and its members. Amwins is a leading global specialty insurance distributor and continues to provide American Legion Auxiliary members with the most cost effective options and comprehensive coverage;

"AND WHEREAS, Amwins has been a generous donor to the Wall of Heroes Initiative to show support for veterans and service members;

"BE IT RESOLVED, that the American Legion Auxiliary expresses its sincere appreciation to our partners at Amwins for their loyal service and continued generosity to support the mission of the organization by giving applause."

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: And basically, you've already applauded. So this courtesy resolution is adopted. Please continue, Lisa.

MS. CHAPLIN: Thank you, Madam President. I'll now read the second resolution:

"WHEREAS, ShipThrifty is an authentic supporter of the American Legion Auxiliary's mission and continues to display that in the work that they do with ALA units and departments. ShipThrifty educates, inspires and empowers people to send care packages to service members through incredible no-cost tools, expert support, connections and proven processes that support thousands of military care packing events each year;

"AND WHEREAS ShipThrifty is a generous sponsor of the August NEC meeting for the second year in a row;

"BE IT RESOLVED, that the American Legion Auxiliary expresses its gratitude to Rob and Michelle Williams at ShipThrifty for empowering ALA members to ship care packages and support the well-being of service members near and far."

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: With your applause, this courtesy resolution is adopted. Please continue.

(Applause)

MS. CHAPLIN: Thank you, Madam President.

I will now read the last courtesy resolution.

"WHEREAS, the dedicated delegates, alternates and guests have gathered in Charlotte, North Carolina for the American Legion Auxiliary 102nd National Convention to hear the

accomplishments of the world's largest patriotic auxiliary organization and to show their dedication in their memberships, serving our heroes and mission outreach efforts.

"BE IT RESOLVED, that this courtesy resolution expresses our heartfelt appreciation and grateful thanks to all named in this resolution who shared time with us;

"AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we express our heartfelt thanks in appreciation to this extraordinary woman, American Legion Auxiliary National President Vickie Koutz by giving her a standing ovation" --

(Applause and standing ovation)

MS. CHAPLIN: -- "demonstrating our love, support and pride in all her accomplishments along with the unanimous thank you for keeping us all mission driven."

Madam President, this concludes the resolutions report. Thank you.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you, Lisa, and to the committee for this. Thank you.

Our resolutions committee is not only the group working hard behind the scenes at the convention but let's give them another big round of applause once more. They worked

really hard to get those done.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Our next group is the distinguished guests committee and they're the ones in the distinguished guest room that you seen when you walk in if you get to come up on stage. And they're truly behind the scenes at the convention. Let's give a hand to our distinguished guest committee.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: We have PNP Carlene Ashworth, Chairman; PNP Desiree Stoy, Vice-Chairman --

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: -- and PNP Mary Davis, member.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you, ladies. They do a wonderful job back there making sure everyone feels comfortable. So, thank you so much.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Would Vickie Stainbrook from the Department of Indiana please come to the podium and present the National President's scrapbook.

(Applause and music)

MS. STAINBROOK: Madam National President, we are so

proud of you. I'm going to be (indiscernible) and I'm going to try not to cry. Not only have I been able to go around taking pictures trying to assemble them to best represent your year, I appreciate everyone's help who has been in pictures. Your husband is amazing. He's always posting on Facebook. But most importantly, I know you're not a Facebook person. You have done an amazing job. I have for you, since you're going home hopefully soon, right?

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Yes.

MS. STAINBROOK: Your homecoming scrapbook. And, of course, I will finish the big book later.

But I do have something from the juniors, mainly from your unit and from your district. This is from the Department of Indiana. The juniors wanted you to know what they were doing.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: That's so nice.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: She has worked tirelessly on this. I know I can't wait to see when it's all completed.

(Music played)

AUTOMATED GREETING: The American Legion Auxiliary kindly presents the National President's Award for Excellence.

This exclusive honor is awarded to the best of our best. The award epitomizes service not self by recognizing efforts and planning and implementation of our programs. Here to present is your National President, Vickie Koutz.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: The National President's Award for Excellence gives me the opportunity to highlight units that are doing amazing work to carry out the mission of our organization. This year we're going to recognize 5-unit winners. We have a lot to celebrate so let's get going.

National Central Division Vice President, Ann Rehbein, would you like the honor of announcing the first winner of the National President's Award for Excellence?

MS. REHBEIN: It would be my pleasure, Madam President.

Our first unit focused on National Security and Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation. Please put your hands together for Unit 186 in Little River, South Carolina.

(Applause)

MS. REHBEIN: And a big thank you to member, Chris McCreary, for telling us all about your unit's great work.

Unit 186 partnerships with South Carolina family readiness coordinator, Myrtle Beach VA Clinic, Local Veterans

Homeless Shelter, Assistant Living Facilities and Veterans Local Food Pantry have been nothing short of remarkable. They have extended their support through financial contributions, countless volunteer hours and generous donations. Truly making a difference in the lives of many.

Congratulations, Unit 186. We are so proud of your unwavering commitment to supporting our community.

(Applause)

MS. REHBEIN: The second unit to receive the National President's Award for Excellence focused on Community Service and Children in Youth. With a big round of applause, let's welcome to the stage, Beaumont Unit 33 in Texas. Thank you to unit member, Christine Trahan, for sharing your unit's story.

During the Christmas season, Unit 33 embarked on a heartwarming mission collecting gifts for children who were facing difficult circumstances, many of whom have lost their parents to suicide and were in foster care. Through their close collaboration with local schools, they identified 101 underprivileged children and ensured they had a Christmas filled with happiness and surprises. The generosity of Unit 33 and the community was impressive resulting in a collection of 1,186 toys, 15 bicycles and 1,381 items of clothing.

Unit 33 showed immense love and care for the seniors in our community through their first annual Valentine for Seniors initiative by collecting over 500 boxes of candy and cards. They brought smiles to the faces of the elderly in nursing homes in Beaumont, Nederland and Lumberton.

Congratulations, Unit 33. We appreciate your dedication.

(Applause)

MS. STOY: Our next winning unit focused on several programs but really excelled in communities, service and Americanism. Please welcome to the stage Leonard Conley, Unit 216, Gretna, Nebraska.

(Applause)

MS. STOY: A round of applause for unit member, Cindy Moore, who nominated her unit for this fabulous award.

(Music played)

MS. STOY: Today we applaud Unit 216 for their unwavering commitment to the American Red Cross mission and their incredible 45-year journey of hosting lifesaving blood drives. The American Red Cross recently bestowed upon Unit 216 a prestigious certificate commemorating their longstanding commitment to hosting blood drives. This incredible milestone

caught the attention of the nation as the story went viral on the Red Cross blog site spreading their inspiration efforts far and wide.

Not stopping there, Unit 216 continued to make waves in the community through proactive engagement with local media and social media channels. Countless events were successfully hosted by the unit thanks to their tireless efforts and spreading awareness and rallying support. Their remarkable achievements have not only touched the hearts of their local community but have reached far beyond.

Congratulations, Unit 216, on receiving this well deserved recognition for your extraordinary contributions.

(Applause)

MS. REHBEIN: The fourth unit to receive the National President's Award for Excellence did amazing work in Community Service and National Security. Please put your hands together for Liberty Unit 289, Strasburg, Illinois.

(Applause)

MS. REHBEIN: Here goes to unit member, Jill Layton for sharing this unit's amazing achievements.

Liberty Unit 289 Day of Giving event on January the 16th, 2023 left a lasting impression. On that special day, unit

289 warmly opened their doors providing not just physical warmth but also emotional warmth to those in need. They offered snacks and sewing machines to the 19th district to enable them to create and stuff bears that would later be presented to various heroes recognizing their courage and dedication.

But their kindness did not stop there. Liberty Unit 289 went above and beyond taking some of those heartwarming bears and presenting them to the Neoga police chief. These bears were meant to bring comfort and solace to small children whom the police officers met in calendar during their calls showing their community to caring for the young ones -- showing their commitment -- excuse me -- showing their commitment during their calls for the young ones and their communities. Today we honor Liberty 289 for their extraordinary compassion and dedication to making a difference in the lives of those who need it most.

(Applause)

MS. DAVIS: Let's stick with the theme of National Security and Community Service by welcoming our next winner.

Gaines T. Evans Unit 44, Elephant Butte, New Mexico.

(Applause)

MS. DAVIS: A big thank you to the unit member,

Virginia Lucero, for sharing the story of Unit 44 with all of us.

(Music played)

MS. DAVIS: Month after month, Unit 44 has shown immense support for our troops stationed overseas by sending care packages totaling an astonishing 10,171 packages to date. These thoughtful packages filled with love and gratitude have provided comfort to those serving far away from home.

In the spirit of giving, Unit 44 didn't forget about our elderly and shut-in neighbors during the holiday season. They delivered 41 heartwarming Christmas presents to the Sierra Joint Office on Aging. Each is a handmade quilt crafted by the Winter Quilters.

Unit 44's dedication extends to recognizing the invaluable support of local businesses in making a positive impact on the community. They expressed their gratitude through certificates of appreciation acknowledging those businesses that have gone above and beyond to make a difference in the lives of others.

Unit 44, congratulations on receiving a well-deserved recognition for your exceptional service.

(Applause)

MS. WILLIAMSON: This year's National President's Award for Excellence had a maximum of five winners. And you've just seen their amazing stories. National President Vickie and I were so impressed with all the great work that's happening in the unit level. In fact, so impressed we couldn't stop at just five winners.

So, I'm here with an honorable mention. Let's put our hands together for this unit's amazing work with the juniors and Poppy programs. Sprague-Inman Unit 577 in Lena, Illinois.

(Applause)

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you to unit member, Julia Moore, for sharing this unit's achievements.

(Music played)

MS. WILLIAMSON: Their Poppy initiative resulted in an impressive number of over 130 posters submitted for judging showcasing their commitment to engaging the community and raising awareness for a meaningful program. Paying tribute to the sacrifices of our brave heroes, Unit 577 led to the distribution of poppies throughout the community. This initiative involved the American Legion Family including junior members all coming together to participate in the distribution fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose.

Congratulations, Unit 577. Your efforts have made us proud of you. Congratulations.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: And now it is time to present our department winner of the National President's Award for Excellence. This department's theme this year was treasuring our veterans. They embrace the spirit of togetherness, fostering strong bonds of the department and as a Legion Family across the state.

Through their collective efforts, they worked tirelessly on various programs all aimed at improving the lives of our veterans and their families. Their commitment to service is truly awe-inspiring as evidenced by the astounding 65,356 hours dedicated to volunteering. During this time, they served an impressive number of 5,846 veterans, active-duty military personnel, their families and children and youth and the communities they serve.

Noteworthy activities undertaken by this department are back-to-school drives, book donations, assembling Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets for families in need. Their generosity also extended to volunteering in food banks and soup kitchens as well as preparing and delivering food to senior

centers spreading kindness and support to those in need.

Throughout their journey, the Department of Maryland -

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(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: -- has met wonderful individuals, enjoyed moments of comradery and, above all, made a profound difference in the lives of those who have sacrificed so much for our freedom and security for their families.

Our department, winner of the National President's Award for Excellence, goes to the Department of Maryland.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: A big thank you to the Department President, Carmin Brittain, for submitting your department for this prestigious award.

(Music played)

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Now I know there are so many units and departments out there doing amazing work that we never hear about on the national level. So, a big thank you to all the members, the units and departments working in Auxiliary's mission and programs every day. Your hard work is what will keep our organization alive and able to carry out its mission.

(Applause)

MS. WILLIAMSON: It's difficult to be limited by time and only be able to share about all these amazing achievements. But there's good news. You'll be able to read a full story on our National President's Award of Excellence winners on our national website.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: As we set up for the National President's report, the chair calls on National Secretary, Coral Grout, to make a few convention updates. Coral?

(Music played)

MS. GROUT: The Department of Pennsylvania has two tickets to the States Dinner. See Pat, wherever you are, Pat.

Thank you, Madam President. And the following updates are for your information and help. The installation opens today at 1:15 p.m. Everything will start at 1:30 p.m.

The state's dinner begins at 7 p.m. in the Convention Center Crown Ball room.

The American Legion Auxiliary Foundation's silent auction will announce winners this evening during the state's dinner. So, make sure your bids have been placed for your favorite items.

Georgia has one ticket for the state's dinner for sale. See Patty Hawkins after the meeting if you are interested. Thank you.

Now as of right now, the Wall of Heroes has raised -- drumroll, please --

(Drumroll)

MS. GROUT: -- as soon as I find it -- \$8,123.

(Applause)

MS. GROUT: They would like to thank you for your generous donations. Can we make it 10 grand?

That concludes.

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Well, I said it on Monday when we opened the convention and I'll say it again. I cannot believe an entire year has gone by. It has been such a privilege to serve as your National President, and I will always remember the amazing members I met, the friendships I made and the memories that will last a lifetime.

But you know what they say. A picture is worth a thousand words. So let me show you how awesome this past year has been. Please watch the screen.

(Videotaped presentation of National President's report played)

MR. KOUTZ: "A little girl born and raised in southern Indiana is about to set out on a mission with the backing of a great team to support our veterans, military, and communities during her travels around the country and around the globe.

"Part of the ALA mission is the spirit of service not self. I'd like to share a quote from one of my favorite selfless individuals who was all about giving back and supporting, Dolly Parton. The quote is "You'll never do a whole lot unless you're brave enough to try."

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: "Thank you, Michael, for inspiring me with that quote.

"And you know what? Michael and Dolly were right. This was a year of many experiences, and I did a whole lot because I was brave enough to try. I tried new foods, traveled to new places and met amazing new people. These grassroots members welcomed me into their homes and showed me what "Mission Driven" means to them. They truly are moving this organization forward.

"At every department visit, I had the opportunity to see our mission in action. In Arkansas, I helped giftwrap presents for veterans' families at the VA Healthcare Center.

Then it was off to North Dakota to watch our talented

young people participate in the department oratorical contest. They were so talented I was disappointed to leave them but not disappointed to leave the below zero temperatures."

(Laughter)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: "Next step was Puerto Rico where the weather was warm and sunny just like the people. As a National President, you get the privilege of laying wreaths all over the country. But I have to say the wreath I laid at the Puerto Rico National Cemetery was the most beautiful one I had ever seen.

"And just like that, I was already five months into my presidency. Mid-year has always been marked with the American Legion Washington conference. And I was honored to participate in the committee meetings, speak at the commander's call and have a wonderful time honoring recipients of the Samsung Scholarship Banquet.

"Every president will tell you that Fisher House visits are always a highlight of their year. And while the layout of each house is almost identical, it's the artwork and décor they choose for their walls that makes them unique to their location.

"South Carolina's Fisher house will always stand out to me because of the incredible piece of textured artwork

featuring animals made from various fabrics found throughout the house. It was absolutely stunning.

"Fisher Houses are so special because they concentrate on the families.

"We all know that military families face unique obstacles. But there are special challenges specific to our military children. These young people have to be brave and strong every day.

"In California, I joined a Legion family and delivered sports equipment to schools on base at Fort Irwin. And in Washington, I visited Santa's Castle on the grounds of Joint Base Lewis-McChord where service members can shop for their children. And anyone who knows me knows how much I love Christmas. So, I was ready to put on my elf ears and pointy shoes and stay forever.

"But the Legion family called so it was time to trade the snow of Santa's Castle for the snow of Alaska. It was a privilege to tour Alaska Veterans Pioneer Home with Sons' Commander, Chris Carlton. And after our tour, we joined National Commander, Jim Troiola, who was getting to meet his biggest fan. I'm predicting we see this junior member at a future ALA Girls State.

"While I could only attend two ALA Girl State events this year, one in Indiana and the other in Iowa, I wish I could have gone to every department's event. ALA Girls State and ALA Girls Nation are such an amazing week of learning, focused on responsible citizenship, leadership and love for God and country. Being around such talented young women was truly an honor.

"Visiting our departments and seeing our members in action was a privilege I will never forget. I wish I could have taken you all with me because our members at work is really something you have to see firsthand. Describing it doesn't do it justice.

"I feel the same way about the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. Attending this event is so moving. I wish everyone could experience it at least once. This annual event co-presented by the American Legion Auxiliary and the VA has been a favorite event of mine ever since my first festival in 2019.

"Thank you to everyone who contributed to raising funds for our festival companions. Seeing a roomful of veterans and their companions at each meal warmed my heart. They were so happy to have that time together. And many of them thanked the

ALA for making this possible. Your generous donations not only made an immediate impact but will ensure that veterans and their companions will be eating together for many years to come.

"You've truly helped me to create an ALA legacy.

Thank you.

"My year was filled with so many opportunities to honor those who served in the military, in wartime or peace time. For my wreath at the Vietnam Veterans Wall and the Vietnam Women's Memorial in Washington, D.C. to attending the National Wreaths Across America ceremony in Rhode Island, I have been blessed to be given the opportunity to offer my appreciation for their sacrifice.

"In Louisiana, I laid a wreath at the Gold Star Memorial and then had the distinct pleasure of speaking at the Gold Star Mothers annual national convention for executive director, Sara Riegel, and I signed a memorandum of understanding making our mutual support of a shared mission official. All of these moments will hold a special place in my heart. And while I appreciated each one, my mind always returned to our POW-MIAs and the families who have not yet been able to experience the peace of a final resting place.

"Thank you to Fairhaven, Vermont Post and Unit 49 for

holding your weekly POW-MIA vigil. It is a beautiful reminder that not all are home.

"I'd like to thank all the ALA and Legion family members who welcomed me into their units and departments with open arms. Thank you to Team Indiana for your generous support I've received over the years.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: "To my son, Michael, and son-in-law, Ryan, thank you for always being a phone call away and continuing to support me during this time.

"To my brothers and sister-in-law, I love you and appreciate you.

"And to Jimmy for being my bag carrier when I needed it and supporting me during this time as the National President.

"And soon, I'll be back home again in Indiana. Thank you all for an unforgettable year."

(Applause)

(End of videotaped presentation)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Thank you so much. I have to tell you a little story. My husband does not like to hold my hand.

So, the last parade that we had was in Indianapolis at that convention. And I said, can you just hold my hand one time just so people show, you know -- everybody else holds their wife's hands. And he says, well, I'll do it when we go in front of the reviewing stand.

(Laughter)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: So, I had to put that in as the last thing.

Thank you so much for joining me in Charlotte to celebrate all of our accomplishments this past year. I could talk forever about the great work of our members.

But I think I see a checkered flag calling me to the finish line.

(Laughter)

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: I will be forever grateful to have served as your National President. And while I will miss seeing our members all in action every single day, I know you're in great hands with your 2023-2024 National President, Lisa Williamson.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Keeping our mission driven theme,

it's time for me to hit the road. J.P., could you please play us out a little Dolly Parton, please?

(Music played)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Lisa, it's your 9 to 5 gig now. I hope you love it as much as I did.

(Dolly Parton song, 9 to 5, played)

PRESIDENT KOUTZ: Ladies and gentlemen, we are now recessed.

(Adjournment)

(Whereupon, at 10:30 a.m. on August 30, 2023, the ALA National Convention Session III concluded.)

<u>Minutes Approval Committee</u>	<u>Date Approved</u>
Barbara White (AZ)	June 3, 2024
Sharon Spiker (KS)	June 3, 2024
Vicki Ozenbaugh (NE)	June 3, 2024