

THE BLUE HATTER



The Official Newsletter of The American Legion Department of Utah

JANUARY 2024

VOICES OF VETERANS

utlegion.org

CONGRESS PASSES NDAA IN THE ELEVENTH HOUR

On December 13th, after months of negotiation and division, the Senate overwhelmingly agreed to pass the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for 2024. Eighty seven out of 100 Senators voted in favor of the bill, displaying the conference committee's success in creating a bill that is acceptable across party lines. However, this show of congressional unity came at the very last minute, leaving the House with just one day to send the bill to President Biden's desk before recess.

In the original version of the NDAA, House leaders included many social and cultural amendments which were stripped from the bill passed by the Senate. Despite the changes to the text, the NDAA conference bill still had strong support across the House of Representatives.

Early on Thursday morning, with less than a day to spare before recess, the House voted in favor of the critical spending package, allowing it to become law. The bill includes a 5.2% pay raise for servicemembers, makes critical improvements to basic allowance for housing (BAH), and ensures cost-of-living allowances for servicemembers stationed in high-cost regions. On top of improvements to military quality of life, the bill makes critical authorizations to protect our allies and foreign interests.

Notably, the bill funds the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative through 2027, allowing \$300 million to be extended to Ukraine in 2024. The NDAA also ensures the United States' commitment to NATO, especially against the threat of Russian expansion. While containing the Russian threat remains a geopolitical priority, the NDAA takes many steps to strengthen American positioning in the Pacific. \$14.7 billion is allocated to the Pacific Deterrence Initiative through 2024, which helps sustain a U.S. military advantage over China. Moreover, the bill authorizes increased engagement and military cooperation with Taiwan to deter Chinese military operations.



To further secure our posture in the Pacific, the NDAA enables the United States to engage in a partnership with the United Kingdom and Australia known as AUKUS. AUKUS bolsters Australia's role in stabilizing the region and maximizes American and British capabilities in the Indo-Pacific when needed. The bicameral and bipartisan work of the NDAA conference is critical, and provisions for our nation's security can now be signed into law and authorized by President Biden before the new year.

COMMANDER'S CALL



Ninzel Rasmuson

2024
MAKE IT
COUNT!

Happy 2024 New Year! As we ring in the new year, I hope this message finds all of you healthy and happy. November 14-16, 2023, some of you participated in our Department Membership and Revitalization efforts. Additionally, we had two **Be The One** events focusing on veteran suicide prevention. We enjoyed our partnership with the Utah Department of Veteran and Military Affairs at the Utah Jazz game as well as an event held in Provo, both of which were to focus on the Be the One initiative. Michelle Steinmetz from National Headquarters joined our efforts and was able to

provide a wealth of information and guidance to help our Department, which was greatly appreciated.

Also, two videos were completed by the Media and Communications team from National Headquarters and are available for viewing on YouTube on The American Legion HQ site. We have continued to meet every membership goal since July 2023 and we work towards meeting our 100% goal by Spring 2024. Thank you all for continuing to take the time to reach out and do Buddy Checks, as this is very important as we continue to make sure veterans and their families know that we care.

I encourage all posts and districts to continue to work on their Americanism programs to support our youth. Please continue to work on your post and district oratorical contests so we have great contestants for the Department Oratorical Contest on March 9, 2024 at the Provo Historic Courthouse.

Utah Boys State information is available at <https://apps.weber.edu/boysstate/> which is a premier program for students who have finished their Junior year of high school. We also have Baseball, Jr. Shooting Sports, and Scouting programs under Americanism. For any needed information, please contact the respective Chairs for questions and answers.

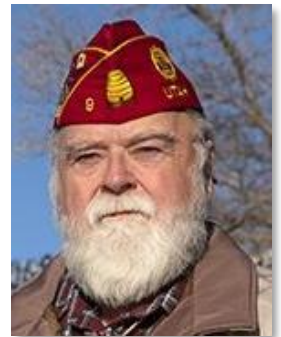
Thank you for all of your continued efforts to support our pillars of Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children & Youth. Legionnaires are a great asset to this Nation for all that they do, and I greatly appreciate your continued service as veterans.

THE BLUE HATTER is an American Legion Department of Utah publication intended for American Legionnaires, Sons of The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, Legion Riders and friends of The American Legion. It is published bi-monthly. Submissions, comments and suggestions are always welcome.

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEEMAN

By the time you read this Christmas and New Years celebrations will be over as will year 2023. Thanks to all who helped with the Utah Jazz **Be The One** Event at the Delta Center in November. Special Thanks go to former Jazz coach and Legion member Frank Layden. It was a most successful endeavor.

Please advise your Post members that all WWII Veterans are now allowed to enroll in VA Healthcare. Department of Veterans Affairs announced that all World War II Veterans are now eligible for no-cost VA inpatient and outpatient health care. Under this expansion, all WWII Veterans who served between Dec. 7, 1941, and Dec. 31, 1946, are now eligible for VA health care, regardless of their length of service or financial status. These Veterans will not have to pay inpatient or outpatient copays, enrollment fees, or monthly premiums.



Terry Schow

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Alternate National Executive Committeeman



Doug Case

DID YOU KNOW?

You made a difference in some person's life this year! Year's end is the time of year that most people take pause, look back and reflect on their accomplishments and sometimes fret about things they didn't get to. As members of The American Legion, you can rest assured something you have done has made someone's life better. Did you know?

You will have great opportunities to make even more difference in this New Year! As the saying goes, if the Lord's willing and the creek don't rise, and of course depending on reliable health what will you do this year that goes above and beyond your good deeds of 2023? If your bucket list doesn't include making a difference in someone's life, I encourage you to rethink your list. Did you know?

Business in the Department continues to move ever onward! Most often the wheels of progress move excruciatingly slow, that's because every stitch that connects the fabric of our membership and the programs we support are carefully considered in terms of necessity and applicability. Decisions are always made better with the more minds that are involved. Did you know? You too can get involved? Did you know?

A new, completely rewritten Department Constitution, Bylaws and Standing Rules has been distributed! Four years in the making, the new governing documents are a must read for all hands. If you didn't get an electronic copy, contact your District Commander, Area Commander, or the Department Adjutant. The goal is to incorporate your input and have a finished (draft) copy ready for distribution during March 2024, followed by approval at the Department Convention in June 2024. They're a must read because if approved as written they will substantially impact all our Posts. Did you know?

A membership dues increase will take effect beginning in the 2025 membership year! Collections for the next membership year begin July 1, 2024. The new fee to the Department is \$40.00. Post dues if any will need to be in addition to the Department fee. Of course, some of us have heard various comments, (negative) but the fact is, from National on down, we, the membership that keeps the barge afloat, haven't patched enough leaks. Membership has been declining for years and the cost of staying relevant hasn't kept up with inflation. The veterans that will continue to support the four pillars of the Legion will, as they always have, find a way forward. Did you know?

The choice is yours; it's always been yours! You sacrificed for your country, paid a great price for our freedoms and whether or not you choose to make a new year's resolution to step up, get involved and make a difference is entirely up to you. It's a resolution you can keep because it's easy and done for the right reasons. Hindsight just becomes old stories; would have, should have, could have. I encourage you to embrace the adventure ahead and live every minute of it as if it's your last. With the dawn of a new year, your opportunity awaits. **HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

From the Adjutant's Desk...

Now is the time to be planning your participation at the Department and National Conventions. These conventions provide the opportunity to find out what is being planned; offer input; and as importantly, meet and talk with other legionnaires. The conventions may seem a long way off but planning for them is going on now.

The Department Convention will be in Vernal, Utah, June 21-23, 2024. The National Convention will be August 23-29, 2024 in New Orleans, Louisiana. Information on the National Convention may be found at

www.legion.org/convention.



Richard Mead

**Plan Ahead
For Conventions!**

To plan and make sure everyone has a place to stay, it is important to let me know that you are planning to attend. Please let me know now. Also, if you are planning to attend the National 2025 convention in Tampa, Florida, August 22-28, 2025, let me know that as well. I will be requesting rooms for the 2025 National Convention in April 2024.

On another note, contacting Posts and members is essential to keep everyone informed. I have been working to update the database maintained by National, and need everyone's help to make this happen. I have provided a post rosters to the Area and District Commanders asking them to review the information currently available and provide corrections and updates to me. As important as addresses, emails, and phone numbers are, I also need information on when Posts meet and the post membership fees.

Additionally, I encourage each Post and Legion member to update their personal contact information. This may be done on MyLegion.org by setting up an account and updating the information. Please encourage your members to do this. I know that some do not get on the internet and for those members I would encourage the Post adjutants to update the information for them. If you have questions, please contact me.

American Legion Family Members

Don't miss your chance to take the

BASIC TRAINING COURSE



Learn why we do what we do!

It's a FREE self-paced online training for The American Legion Family.

Go to: WWW.LEGION.ORG/ALEI

Department Chaplain



Steve Steed

The New Year

This is a time when we make New Year's resolutions. This is the time when we can make some determinations about the things that we have been thinking about during the holidays. We come now to this very important period of January, this time of a new beginning.

An interesting fact is that January was named after Janus, the old Roman god of doors and beginnings. Janus had one interesting peculiarity; he had two faces. With one face he looked back into the past year to discover his own mistakes and his own successes. Then, through the other face he looked up into the future to make plans



for a new year and to put these great ideas, which have been formed during the past year, into operation.

For all of us, this month of January is the month when we should look forward into the new year and plan for more effective lives. So, at this time of the New Year, we must not forget the lessons that we have learned in the previous year. This is the one time each year when we look back into the past and then move ahead with new beginnings on a clean sheet. We ought to view the New Year as one of the greatest of all great times where we form convictions and make decisions that will govern our future lives.

So, be grateful for the lessons learned and that God has given you victory over many challenges this past year. Whatever new beginnings you are looking forward to, may your new year be filled with happiness, peace, and God's richest blessings.

A reminder to send me names of Legion members who have passed away in the previous year.



AMERICAN
LEGION

Utah
Boys State



Kent Hansen

It seems like only yesterday that we were putting the Utah Boys State Class of 2023 to bed and now, here it is 2024 and this year's Boys State is looming on the horizon. The reality of that is that a massive amount of preparation is required to make it all happen. For some of us, Utah Boys State is a year-round job.

In addition to getting the young men registered (which includes contact information, medical clearances, clothing sizes, dietary needs, housing, athletic schedules and a whole lot of other details. Quality speakers from the Governor of Utah to inspirational war heroes must be invited and dates and times nailed down. Counselors must be recruited, security checked and trained.

Then, there's the daunting task of building the schedule which begins the day before Boys State begins and extends through clean-up after graduation. Each day begins a 6:00 am and every moment is filled until 11:30 pm each night.

Now, you may be thinking that that is too much effort to put into any program. But most compelling reason for immersing yourself in this effort is to be a part of the miracle that happens every year. Hundreds of clueless boys arrive at the beginning of the week, prompted by three hours of college credit, scholarship opportunities or just to get away from Mommy for a week. But over the course of that week, an amazing transformation takes place. These clueless boys, with the leadership of The American Legion staff and first responders, have evolved into well-informed citizens, prepared to contribute to their communities, state and nation.

Here's the good news: you can be a part of the Legion's premier youth program. We are always looking for dedicated volunteers with an eye to the future of our nation. These are the very ideals that we all fought for when we put on the uniform of our country and swore an oath to defend it with our lives. If our sacrifice is to mean anything into the future, we must take an active hand in preparing those who will govern it.

If you have an interest in being part of the miracle, please send an email with a description of your skills and experience to ubs@utahboysstate.org. We'll take all the counselors that our funding can support so give generously. To become involved, contact Utah Boys State President Doug Case (435-790-4782) or Director Kent Hansen (801-589-7667). For more information on the annual Utah Boys State program, go to www.utahboysstate.org.

American Legion Oratorical Contest: "A constitutional speech contest"

The American Legion Oratorical Contest exists to develop deeper knowledge and appreciation for the U.S. Constitution among high school students.

I hope all our posts are considering and working on engaging our youth in the Constitution. The Oratorical contest is not just about earning scholarship money but also learning something about our great Constitution and how it is the Law of the Land.



Shiela Heindel



Please encourage your members in the posts to do their part in spreading the Oratorical contest purposes to the schools, parents, and youth of their communities.

The American Legion National website has the most comprehensive information about the what, why, where, and how a contest should be run: it has the current year's Rules Brochure (has the amendments for the current contest year) a Chairman's Guide (checklists, script, instructions for the process, plus much more) winner videos, and instructions for all participants and staff. legion.org/oratorical

Our department will have the statewide contest on March 9, 2024 at 1:00 pm in Provo at the Old Historic Courthouse on 51 South University Avenue. Please give your district winner's name to Shiela Heindel (seheindel@gmail.com) by March 2, 2024.

A last request: I cannot run the contest by myself!! Please let me know if you are willing to help on March 9th. I need time keepers, tabulators, monitors, and judges. Participants will need to be there at 12:00 pm for briefings.



**SPOTLIGHT
ON
DISTRICT 4,
POSTs 9,
13 & 140**

District 4 posts are doing great things in their communities. Many had holiday gatherings, Oratorical Contests, Military Honors, **Be The One** activities and Buddy Checks, and Collaborations with other posts in the District. One of the Department Revitalization days was held at Post 13 in Provo. They are donating supplies to the Food and Care Coalition in Provo. They all participated in Veterans Day activities throughout the District. We continue to serve our Veterans, their families, and our communities.

Post 9 in Ogden hosted a Pearl Harbor commemoration on December 7 to pay homage to those who died or were injured in the attack that brought the United States into World War II.



Provo Post 13 and VFW Post 8376 held a joint 2023 Winter Solstice Celebration of Life, Health, Happiness & Hope on December 21, 2023 at the Utah Valley Veterans, American Legion - VFW - DAV Center in the Historic Utah County Courthouse Building in Provo with 72 people in attendance. The guest speaker was Gary Blair, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Suicide Prevention Coordinator who spoke on the suicide crisis among veterans and the VA expanded programs to prevent it such as the 24/7 confidential crisis line 988 for veterans and their loved ones. Many members of Orem **Post 72** were in attendance and provided a large BE-THE-ONE banner display to emphasize the American Legion Buddy Check program to shepherd Legionnaires.

American Legion Post 140, Riverton, Utah was invited to participate in the annual Wreaths Across America 2023 event on December 16, 2023. The Post provided an Honor Guard and a small ceremony for the attendees in coordination with the Mayor and Staff of Riverton City.

Riverton City Cemetery was the location of the event as it rolled across America starting at Arlington National Cemetery at 10:00 AM on the Saturday before Christmas. This event is especially meaningful to honor and provide recognition for the 370 veterans in the City Cemetery. The public was invited to participate in the wreath laying, speaking each Veterans name, and respectfully recognizing their service. The Post was honored to be able to take part in this event.



Legion Laffs BY KENT HANSEN

YESSIR, THIS YEAR I'M GONNA LOSE WEIGHT!
I'M GONNA DIET! I'M GONNA WORK OUT AND STICK TO IT!
OOO! DID SOMEONE BRING CAKE?



Veterans Crisis Line



DIAL 988 then
PRESS 1