Happy New Year!

From the Officers and Members of The Department of France
DEPARTMENT COMMANDER

James Settle

My Fellow Legionaries

First I hope all off you had a very Merry Christmas, filled with Joy and Happiness, and I wish all of you a very prosperous and successful new year in 2014.

On the 6th of December Post David Chavez GR1982, held its annual Christmas Party I was unable to attend this event, due to health issues, but my understanding is that it was a very successful event.

Kaiserslautern Post GR01 conducted its annual Christmas Dinner on the 21st of December. I along with the SAL Commander and the Auxiliary President attended this event. I must say the event was well planned and all there enjoyed the camaraderie. Thanks to all for the great time.

John Wayne Post GR79 prepared a feast for the homeless on the 26th of December in the Heilbronn area. Commander Brown informed that this was a very successful event, and was supported by all members of the post.

Our next big event is The Department Oratorical Final which will be held on the 22nd of February 2014 in Stuttgart. Now is the time to start preparing for this event. I would really like to see more contestants at this year’s event, and more support from the posts. If your area does not have a DoD School offer support/help to a post that does, this worked out just fine last year between post GR03 and GR79. If you have conducted your post finials please ensure that you provide the name of your contestant to the Department Adjutant, Comrade Rice so he can prepare some of the required paperwork, in advance. Comrade Rice’s E-mail is colwichboy@yahoo.com or Max.Rice@lavatec-laundry.com
The Department is still in need of a JROTC Chairman. If you are interested in this program, please contact me or the Department Adjutant Comrade Max Rice or me.

**MEMBERSHIP, MEMBERSHIP, MEMBERSHIP.** I cannot stress membership enough. It is the bloodline of our organization. It enables us to perform our missions to the Veterans and their Families, and supports not only National Programs but ours also. While you are out there recruiting, new members do not forget your current members, get them to renew in a timely manner. If you have any questions on membership do not hesitate to contact the Membership Chairman Comrade Brown, at [joedan.pascal1@googlemail.com](mailto:joedan.pascal1@googlemail.com). He can answer your questions and resolve any problems you are having with membership. Keep in mind that the National’s 80% target date is due to National by the 18th of January 2014, this means that Comrade Brown needs your transmittals not later than the 8th of January 2014.

In closing I wish all of you a Very Happy and Prosperous New Year in 2014. Please keep those in harm’s way and their families, in your thoughts and prayers also.

James M. Settle
Department Commander

Phone: 07138-67359
E-Mail: [james.settle@kabelbw.de](mailto:james.settle@kabelbw.de)

The Department Web Page is: 
[www.AmerLegionDeptFrance.org](http://www.AmerLegionDeptFrance.org)

The department has a Face Book page at the following [www.Facebook.com/ALDeptFrance](http://www.Facebook.com/ALDeptFrance). Please visit and like this page. Thanks
My Fellow Legionaries
I hope all off you had a very Merry Christmas, filled with Joy and Happiness, and I wish all of you a very prosperous and successful new year in 2014.

We are at 78% in membership at this point in time. The National’s 80% target date is due to National by the 18th of January 2014, this means that I need your transmittals not later than the 8th of January 2014. We are very close to being able to make the 80% target date. I would encourage you to double check and make sure that you have not forgotten to transmit a member. If you are holding onto a transmittal please get it to me ASAP. Let’s take care of our members and submit those transmittals.

In closing I wish all of you a Very Happy and Prosperous New Year in 2014. Please keep those in harm’s way and their families, in your thoughts and prayers also.

Joe D. Brown
Department Membership Chairman/VCAL

The Department Web Page is: www.AmerLegionDeptFrance.org
The department has a Face Book page at the following www.Facebook.com/ALDeptFrance. Please visit and like this page. Thanks.

GR14 POST COMMANDER JOE JAMES (middle) BIRTHDAY PARTY

GR07 POST COMMANDER CASBY LOGAN (second from L ) BIRTHDAY PARTY

GR79 COMMANDER JOE BROWN (right) PRESENTED AWARD TO BOB RUSHING
MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS
TO JOIN THE AMERICAN LEGION

IMPORTANT: EVERYONE MUST SUBMIT A COPY OF
DD 214 OR DISCHARGE

NEW MEMBERSHIP
Eligible veterans applying for first time membership must submit the following information to Post
Membership Committee:
1. Complete American Legion Membership application. Applications are available at the Post Home
2. COPY OF DD214 OR DISCHARGE
3. Membership Dues Payment. Dues. (Amount Shown on Application). Make checks payable to your
   Post
4. If the information is correct, membership will be approved and then a membership card will be
   mailed to you.
5. Please see eligibility dates below.
6. Membership dues payment, if current year dues are not paid. If current dues are paid, please pay
   dues for next year's membership.

TRANSFERS
Veterans applying for transfers from your current Post to our Post must submit the following:
a. Completed Member Data Form.
b. COPY OF DD214 OR DISCHARGE
c. COPY OF MEMBERSHIP CARD

MEMBERSHIP ELIGIBILITY in the American Legion is based on honorable service with the U. S. Armed
   Forces between:
   (April 6, 1917 -November 11, 1918) World War I
   (December 7, 1941 - December 31, 1946) World War II
   (June 25, 1950 - January 31, 1955) Korean War
   (February 28, 1961 - May 7, 1975) Vietnam War
   (August 24, 1982 - July 31,1984) Lebanon/Grenada
   (December 20, 1989 - January 31, 1990) Operation Just Cause
   (August 2, 1990 - Today)* Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm

Because eligibility dates remain open, all members of the U.S. Armed Forces are eligible to join The
American Legion at this time, until the date of the end of hostilities as determined by the government
of the United States. Must have served at least one day of active military duty during one of the dates
below and honorably discharged or still serving honorably.

For any questions please contact our Membership Chairman Charlie Joe BROWN

joedan.pascal1@googlemail.com  M-0170-1888034
Greetings, Commanders & Legionnaires,

As the Department of France Vice Commander, I have been assigned the following Posts: Riley Leroy Pitts Post GR07, Thomas W. Barnett GR14, John F. Kennedy Post IR63 Facebook site: www.facebook.com/AmericanLegionIRL, George S. Patton Post GR45, Rotterdam Post NL01, and Portugal (Nunv Alvares Pereira) Post PO-01. The Portugal Post submits their Post Newsletters to the FODPAL site. Doug Haggan (FODPAL Secretary) is asking the Department and Posts to submit pictures and small articles to the FODPAL website: http://www.legion.org Click FODPAL site listed below the Legion Homepage. FODPAL (Foreign and Outlying Departments and Posts of The American Legion) is asking for special programs and events (Post Christmas Parties), and Facebook sites. The Department of France Newsletters is posted on the FODPAL website. Click Newsletters. Also, listed in the FODPAL Newsletter site is Post IR63 and Portugal Post PO01. Would like to commend Paul Skinner (Kaiserslautern Post GR01 Post website: www.kaiserslauternamericanlegion.org Many thanks to the Department Commander (James Settle), Department Auxiliary President (Isolde Settle), and Department SAL Detachment Commander (Joshua Settle) attended the Kaiserslautern Post GR01 Christmas Party (21 December 13) at the Restaurant Asia (Kaiserslautern, Germany). Pictures published on the Kaiserslautern Post Website. Attended the Ansbach Post GR1982 Christmas party (6 December 13). It was snowing but the Christmas spirit was there.

Post GR07 is moving to Mannheim-Kafertal, date to be determined. The next TWB Post 14 meeting is: 8 Jan.14/7 P.M. (Buedingen) at the Gastatte Schroth (Buedingen Orleshausen). Please send your Post Americanism Reports, to Carl Hacksworth. I talk on Skype every Monday evening. You can reach me on Skype: stephenallenward. Portugal Post Adjutant Wells provides me information on the internet. I appreciate the updates. I haven’t received any information from Rotterdam Post NL01. I received information from the Post IR-63 Facebook site.

I stress the importance of membership in the Posts, Department, and the National Organization. Membership is our Voice on Capitol Hill. Department Membership Chairman (Brown) has sent the 2014 December Membership Stats to the Posts. As of December 13, Riley Leroy Pitts Post GR07 (34 Members/53%), Thomas W. Barnett GR14 (52 Members/86%), John F. Kennedy Post IR-63 (13 Members/23%), George S. Patton Post GR45 (1 Member/0.35%), Rotterdam Post NL01 (3 Members/100%), and Portugal Post PO01 (17 Members/85%). Please send your Post transmittal to the Department Membership Chairman as soon as possible. I encourage the Posts to transmit each month to the Department Membership Chairman (Joe Dan Brown).

Commanders & Fellow Legionnaires, many thanks for what you do for your Posts and the communities you serve. Happy Holidays to All.

STEPHEN A. WARD
VICE COMMANDER
DEPARTMENT OF FRANCE

Kaiserslautern Post GR01 Oratorical Contest won by Avalon Roche (Kaiserslautern High School). The Post Oratorical Contest was held 18 December 13 at the Ramstein Community Center (Ramstein, Germany). Many thanks to David Sears (Past Post Commander) organized the Oratorical Contest. The Kaiserslautern Post GR01 Christmas Party was held 21 December 13 at the Restaurant Asia (Kaiserslautern, Germany). Attended the Department of France Commander (James Settle), Isolde Settle (Department President Auxiliary), and Joshua Settle (Department SAL Detachment Commander) and many guests. Many thanks to our Post Webmaster (Paul Skinner) for taken and posting the pictures on the Post website: www.kaiserslauternamericanlegion.org
DEPARTMENT VICE COMMANDER Jerry Aman

On 30 November I attended GR 79’s traditional Thanksgiving dinner ch the post hosts yearly and invites many of their German friends and officials from the city of Heilbronn.

It was some time after my arrival that I was finally able to “flag down” Commander Charley Brown as he was busy rushing from the kitchen to the buffet table where his volunteers were placing the food on the table. After his final inspection Approximately 100 guests slowly got into line (I noticed that no one rushed as it was obvious to the guests that there was enough food for everyone). The impressive array and quantity of food would have done many an Army dining facility proud. None of this could even have been considered without the energetic effort of many of the post’s members. Seven households alone were necessary just to bake the 140 lbs of turkey. All of the trimmings and condiments were also prepared by its members. Although there was no threat of running out of turkey meat but to ensure that every one had enough Vice Commander Casby Logan had his deep fat fryer cooking in the kitchen and moved through the crowd offering CFCs (Casby’s Fried Chicken) and hush puppies.

After everyone finished eating Commander Brown led an entertaining afternoon with raffles, prizes and a good time for everyone.

Again, good Job GR 79 and “hats off” to everyone who helped put on this pleasant event. I have but one question; in a traditional Thanksgiving dinner what were Spätzle doing there?

My Visit to GR 1982

On 5 & 6 December I visited GR 1982 in Anbach and on the 5th I was fortunate enough to sit in on the oratorical speeches presented by two candidates for selection to participate in the Department’s oratorical contest in February. Commander Buchanan did an outstanding job organizing this event and had selected five very serious judges. Although only two candidates presented their orations the winner, Reiwan Hussein, presented a smooth and professional speech on the Constitution of the United States and it was quite evident that she knew her subject. She will represent GR 1982 at the Department’s oratorical finals and the chance to win a $500 scholarship and if she wins she will then be able to participate in the American Legion National contest. My exposure to this event convinced me that we if do not support this program more than we have in the past we are doing an injustice to young and smart students who will use the skills they have developed for this experience in their future endeavors.

Although icy roads and some falling snow prevented some people from driving to the Christmas party on the evening of 6 December Commander Buchanan was pleased with the turnout and those who made it were rewarded with good food and an enjoyable evening in the company of comrades who support our organization. The post had asked that every attendee bring a present which was not exchanged with other attendees but handed out the next day to children from a local Kinderheim (Home for children between the ages of 9 to 19). Guests were not required to bring presents for those kids younger than 9 years as 2nd Vice Commander Ken Aungst took care of that.
Commander Buchanan and his energetic team possess those attributes that make the American Legion one of Americans finest Veterans’ organizations.

**GR09** Legionnaire Orlando Dunn is hospitalized. We will keep him in our thoughts and prayers and pray for a speedy recovery.

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**DEPARTMENT SERVICE OFFICER George Hall**

I am now set up at my home for VA, DAFS, SSA, ACG, CA.
The address is AmKirchwald 3, 69251 Gaiberg

*Phone* H 06223 5475  
*Phone* M 0176 7227 6350  
*Email* hallgt@yahoo.com

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**DEPARTMENT ADVOCATE George W. Seeburger**

After our Department Finance Officer successfully opened Membership with Pentagon Federal Credit Union, Post GR14 initiated action to do the same. Post GR14 has been accepted, in spite of the German address.

If any other Post is interested, keep in mind, that the major disadvantage is that the Checking Account requires a continuous balance of $500.--. Otherwise there is a monthly service fee of $10.--. I have on hand all 4 of the application forms (PDF Format) prepared for fill-in with Acrobat Reader

George W. Seeburger  
Judge Advocate

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**FINANCE OFFICER Gary Miller**

Santa visits GR06…
My fellow Comrades

I hope all of you had a very Merry Christmas, filled with Joy and Happiness, and I wish all of you a very prosperous and successful new year in 2014.

I was able to attend Kaiserslautern Post GR01’s Christmas Dinner, on the 21st of December. I along with all there had a great time. The food was excellent, and the conversation was outstanding. Thank you all from GR01 for the invitation to join you in celebrating your Christmas.

We are currently at 72% in Membership for 2014. I hope that with the New Year the transmittals will flow faster and smoother. Remember the Detachment has a Membership fund which will allow Squadrons to do a transmittal now and then reimburse the Detachment once the dues are collected from their members.

While I was gone for the first half of the month of December, Vice Commander John DuBose conducted the Post’s monthly meeting. The main topic was our upcoming Oratorical Contest scheduled for 25 January. As of 24 December we have 8 contestants schedule to compete for contest with several more indicating their intentions to compete.

During December we recruited 3 new members to the American Legion: Adam C. Van Allen, Emanuel Carter and Chris Arseneault. We also welcomed James FitzGerald, a transfer from the American Legion Post in England. This brings our membership up to 39 members. Our goal for the remainder of 2014 is 50 members or more.

The month of December also saw Post BE02 members participating in several special events. On Saturday, 14 December, Comrade Maurice L. Sperandieu and Graves Registration, Memorials and Ceremony Chairperson, Frank de Rudder attended the Bastogne Nut Walk and ceremony, with both laying a wreath at the General McAuliffe memorial. During the ceremonial both Comrade Maurice L. Sperandieu and Chairperson Frank de Rudder were invited to a reception at the US embassy in Brussels to meet with Ambassador Denise Bauer.
During the afternoon of Saturday, 21 December, the members and their families took part in the Post’s first annual holiday party. Thanks to the help of Comrades Paul Dunn and John Jackson the party was held at the 3-Star lounge on the USAG Brussels compound. We were surprised with a visit from Santa Claus who was well received from the children and the young at heart. At the beginning of the party, Frank de Rudder gave the post a portrait of the Post BE02 flag flying at the Passchendaele ceremony on 10 November. This was the first time that the flag has flown in over 20 years. Overall the party was a huge success.

The Legion Riders have finally been receiving their vests. During the holiday party many of the riders wore their vest and Comrade Paul Dunn graciously posed for some pictures for our photo gallery. The riders periodically take rides to different location throughout the Belgium countryside and cities.

Post BE02 is planning on many activities and events for 2014. With the oratorical contest in January, JROTC cadet recognition in May, the myriad ceremonies throughout the year and continuous membership campaigns, the members of American Legion “Flanders Field” Post BE02 will be seen throughout the U.S. and Belgian communities. The members of the American Legion Post BE02 family wish everyone a safe and happy New Year.

Sincerely,
Joseph Schram
Commander, American Legion Post BE02

Comrade Maurice L. Sperandieu and Graves Registration, Memorials and Ceremony Chairperson Frank de Rudder at Bastogne on 14 December 2013.

Comrade Maurice L. Sperandieu and Graves Registration, Memorials and Ceremony Chairperson Frank de Rudder met with US Ambassader Bauer.
Comrade Dunn and Wife with Santa ➔

BE02 Holiday Party ➔

Riders at the Holiday Party ➔

Receiving a photo of the Post Flag after flying for 20 years ➔

Santa ➔
The last two weeks of December was a busy time for the members of the American Legion, John Wayne Post GR79. The weekend before Christmas, a Past Commander’s wife was robbed of needed Christmas shopping money. Post members became aware of the situation and immediately came forward with a 100% vote to reimburse the family member for her loss. This was done and the family member gave praise for the positive and speedy actions of the post.

December 26, 2013, 1200 hours. There is a line of people stretched from the door to the serving window of the Gildertreff at Wolfganggasse 5, 74072 Heilbronn. While some appear elderly, others appear much younger, but all appear eager. Today is the 2nd Christmas Day and it is special for the people lined up, the Gildertreff Staff, and the American Legion, John Wayne Post GR79. The Post has bought and prepared a special meal for today to be served to all who enter. It consists of turkey, ham, and spaetzle which is being served by members of the post. There is also salad and cake for those that desire it.

1230 hours: The Gildertreff tables are full and there is still a line being served. In the distance I hear someone say, “It looks like over 50 have came and I thought we were only serving 40 to 50”. Someone else replied, “I thought so too but keep feeding them and we will serve as long as the food last”. As another plate was being fill with ham, turkey and spaetzle, another full container of turkey is provided to be served to additional patrons.

For the next 30 minutes, there was a study stream of plates being filled, table conversations, and a spirit of helpfulness. It is now over, the last person standing has been fed, and all the food has been served. Someone now asks, how many did we serve and I listen to the responses “Well over 50”, “about 70”, “more than 70 plates passed by me” “It seemed more like at least a 100” and so on. The best response that I could give to that question is “The number served does not matter as much as the fact that we, John Wayne Post GR79, demonstrated a sense of individual obligation to the Heilbronn Community, our community”. We volunteered to serve when and where it was needed the most.

Later in the month, it was learned that that a member of the Post father had just passed to post everlasting. Once again, members of the legion stepped forward to provide assistance to a veteran and a member of the post.

This month has been a reminder to all our Legionnaires that there is always a need and a place to be a VETERAN STILL SERVING.

Commander John Wayne Post 79
Charlie Brown
December 11, 2013

Post 1982 members collect gifts for early Christmas

During the American Legion Post 1982 Christmas party Dec. 6, from left, Kenneth Aungst, member of the post; Brigitte Meske, a guest at the party; and Derek Anderson, member of the post, pack Christmas gifts collected during the evening. The post gathered the gifts for a local Kinderheim, or children's home.

ANSBACH, Germany (Dec. 10, 2013) -- "To support Veterans, their Families and the Ansbach Community" has been more than just a mission statement for legionnaires of American Legion Post 1982 throughout the year and during the holiday season. Kenneth Aungst and other members made sure of that.

When it came time to decide for the gift exchange among members during their Dec. 6 Christmas party, Aungst suggested that, like last year, everyone should bring a gift for a child or teenager instead.

Presents for more than 30 children and teenagers of a local Kinderheim were collected and given out by "Santa Claus" during an event Dec. 7, according to Master Sgt. Christopher Buchanan, commander of Post 1982.

"Watching these kids with their sponsors, their eyes lighting up when Santa gave them their presents, is a very rewarding experience," said Buchanan.
I NEED PICTURES...I NEED HISTORY

I have a BIG problem; I have run out of pictures to post on The Department of France Website. I know there are Legionnaires in the Department that have pictures that need to be posted on the Website. We NEED to preserve this part of our Department History. If you have pictures for me, send me an e-mail, I will send you a link to a photo sharing program called “DROP BOX”, when you get it go to “get started” and it will tell you step by step on how to use it. It is a program that National uses and it works great when you want to send a large amount of pictures. It’s easy to use, I have setup a folder called The Department of France, just create a file drag it into the Department folder; send me an e-mail with a short story plus date, the function, and location. I will pull it out of Drop box and post it on the Website, it's that easy.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at dhaggan@sbcglobal.net
If you have a couple of minutes login into The Department Website and checkout the Photo Gallery.

LET’S PRESERVE OUR DEPARTMENT HISTORY FOR THE FUTURE

Share your post’s legacy
On Centennial Celebration page
In 2018, The American Legion will begin celebrating 100 years of service to veterans, military personnel, families and communities. To honor the Legion’s centennial, many events at the national, department and post levels will occur starting at the 2018 National Convention in Minneapolis and continuing throughout the 2019 convention in Indianapolis. Planning for these celebratory events is currently underway by the Legion’s 100th Anniversary Observance Committee, but help is needed at the post level to tell the larger story of The American Legion’s first century.

All 13,000 Legion posts worldwide, whether chartered in 1919 or 2009, have histories and legacies that have contributed to the overall identity of The American Legion. Each post can convey its legacy by sharing historical photos, videos and print material on the Legion’s new Centennial Celebration web page: www.legion.org/centennial

How to get started

Posts are encouraged to form centennial committees now, made up of members who will collect historical artifacts and data on the post. For example, the centennial committee may identify:

- Who founded the post and when
- Who the post was named after
- Important dates in the history of the post
- Families involved with the post for multiple generations
- Notable members
- Notable alumni from youth programs such as Boys State, the Oratorical Contest or Legion Baseball
- What makes the post special or unique
- Great things the post has done for its community

If this information isn’t accessible from post archives or members, speak with the local library or media outlets (newspapers, radio, TV) that have covered events about your post.

Share your story

Once your post’s centennial committee has collected photos, videos and print material related to its history, share it on the Legion’s new Centennial Celebration web page.

To create a post history page, follow these seven steps:

1. Go to the Centennial Celebration web page, www.legion.org/centennial
2. Register (in the upper-right hand of the page) to be an administrator. The administrator of a post’s page allows him or her to monitor all content submitted to the page before it appears to the general viewing public.
3. Click "Share Your Post History" located under "History" on the left hand navigation column.
4. Enter your department and post number.
5. Click "Yes, create post x."
6. Complete the required fields needed to start; you only need your post number, city and charter date. If you don’t know when your post was chartered, put in an estimated date until you find the answer; you can add/change information as you receive it.
7. Click "Save" when finished.

Once your post page is created, members — and those whose lives have been touched by the post — can add historical photos, timeline events (significant moments that helped build the chronology of your history) and upcoming events celebrating your history and the Legion’s centennial.

And for step-by-step instructions on how to share your post’s legacy and vision, download the Legion’s Centennial Celebration Workbook here.

If your post does not have access to the technical tools or expertise needed to create a Centennial Celebration history page, the workbook features paper forms of timeline events, photo galleries and upcoming events. The forms can be submitted to a third party who is willing to create the web page and act as the post’s administrator.

For more information, please email: ledwards@legion.org
Be Mad: Congressional Abuse of Military Pay Promises

Being in the military these days is a little bit like being a sad Golden Retriever. We do everything our masters tell us – fight this war, protect that freedom, hold down the home front and suffer through the corresponding tolls of mental health and relationship chaos — only to get kicked under the table anyway.

“How trust us and we’ll take care of you,” our elected officials say. “Fetch, speak and roll over and you can have treat!”

And we follow like the faithful pooch we are. But more and more instead of a cookie our reward is a beating. Paychecks threatened. Services closed. And now, in the ultimate kick to the head, the pension which we currently serving members as well as retirees were promised when we signed that contract is on the line.

In a bipartisan budget agreement known as the Ryan-Murray deal, named after Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) and Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.), who chair the House and Senate budget committees, the pair agreed to cut the yearly value of a 20-year military retirement for the currently serving force as well as younger retirees steadily until they hit age 62. The deal does this by reducing the yearly cost of living adjustment (COLA) to one percent below inflation.

That means that, as a reward for my husband’s hard work and my and our childrens’ sacrifices, if he were to serve 20-years as a typical officer and be 40-years-old when he retires, we would be out a total of $124,000 compared to what our retirement was pledged to be when he joined. And if he was a typical enlisted retiree we would be out $83,000, according to calculations done by the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA).

The only way under this bill that we would escape unscathed is if he sweated for the military an additional 12 years until age 62, giving him (in this example) 42 years of service.

With a measly eight years of service in this house so far, 20 seems mighty far off, much less 32. And how many jobs are there for 60-year-old soldiers anyway?

This deal is in no way “fair.”

One of the facets of the agreement is that removes the Defense Department from the expected sequester cuts that were to hit next year. That means many services that were on the table for possible elimination, including the commissary system, would probably be safe.

And all of that is great. But at what cost? The real abuse here is that members of Congress are convinced this is a good deal — a deal they can work with, a deal they can pass, a deal that does not require too much of any one group.

“We think it’s only fair that hard-working taxpayers who paid for the benefits that our federal employees receive are treated fairly as well,” Ryan said at a press conference. “We also believe it’s important that military families as well as non-military families are treated equally and fair.”

Painting this as an acceptable trade-off is deceptive and definitely not fair. Yanking cash from the calloused, exhausted hands of military retirees is not fair to servicemembers and, despite the $7 billion over 10 years savings, it is not fair to non-military tax payers who will have to fight the wars themselves if we follow our dwindling benefits and broken promises out the door.

The retention conundrum

It all goes back to recruitment and retention. To convince people to join and stay military, the nation both currently and in the past has offered an attractive benefits package. Those benefits — healthcare, retirement, family support programs, etc. — make up for the measly salary which, you’ll recall, adds up to about $25 an hour before taxes for the typical Army Cpt. with seven years of service despite years of training and huge responsibility.

Without those benefits there is less inspiration to join and almost none to stay long term. Love alone for the military life does not pay the rent. When the trials of staying Army, for example, are compared to a cushy corporate life with a bigger bi-weekly paycheck, getting out sounds mighty attractive.

Yes, we chose to serve. Unlike Fido, we do get to choose our masters. But when we made that decision it was with the understanding that it would be worth it. It was with the knowledge that, as a reward for our faithfulness starting at 20 years in, we would receive a specific retirement adjusted for inflation for the rest of our days.

How much more of this Congressional abuse can military members take before we call it quits? Sure, the folks who only intended to be in four or eight years, earn their GI Bills, and go civilian will still be around. And yes, those servicemembers are extremely important.

But what is the military without the leadership and experience brought by those who would serve long term if it weren’t for the infuriating and categorically unfair treatment from our elected officials?

Does this make you angry? Do something about it. Tell your elected officials what you think by quickly and easily sending them your thoughts through this form.
House Trims Pay Raises for Troops, Retirees

The U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation Thursday that would reduce pay raises for troops and retirement benefits for veterans.

A day before adjourning for holiday recess, the Republican-controlled chamber voted 332-94 to approve the Bipartisan Budget Act. Under the bill, federal agencies such as the Defense Department would avoid about $62 billion in automatic budget cuts, known as sequestration, over two years.

It would be paid for in part by scaling back pensions for working-age military retirees.

"This bill is a firm step in the right direction," Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., chairman of the House Budget Committee, said on the floor before the vote. He crafted the budget deal with his Senate counterpart, Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash.

"It's not perfect," he said. "It's a start."

Separately, the House also voted 350–69 in favor of the 2014 National Defense Authorization Act, which outlines military policy goals and spending targets for the fiscal year that began Oct. 1. The legislation would set troops' pay raises at 1 percent next year, fund weapons programs such as the F-35 aircraft and adopt numerous provisions to combat military sexual assault.

The Democratic-led Senate is expected to vote on both measures next week.

The Pentagon faces about $1 trillion in spending cuts over the next decade as part of 2011 deficit-reduction legislation known as the Budget Control Act. That includes almost $500 billion in reductions already planned and another $500 billion in automatic cuts.

The Ryan-Murray bill would undo some of those reductions.

Of the $62 billion in sequestration relief in the pact, $44 billion would be applied in 2014 and another $18 billion in 2015, according to a cost estimate from the Congressional Budget Office. That means the Pentagon would receive an additional $22 billion in 2014 and another $9 billion the following year, according to the office.

Marion Blakey, chief executive officer of the Aerospace Industries Association, an Arlington, Va.-based trade group representing defense and aerospace companies, welcomed the financial predictability the agreement gave the industry.

"Not only will this provide some sequestration relief, allowing at least some essential programs to go forward, it will also allow the appropriations process to proceed and develop a real budget for the remainder of this fiscal year and next," she said in a statement.
The added federal spending would be offset by raising revenue and cutting costs in other areas of the budget, from increasing security fees for commercial airline passengers to reducing contributions to civilian and military pensions.

Military retirees between the ages of 40 and 62 would receive an annual cost-of-living increase to their retirement benefits at 1 percent less than the rise in inflation. The reduction would be phased in over three years and take full effect in 2016.

The pension change could decrease veterans' retirement benefits by nearly 20 percent in some years, according to Michael Hayden, director of government relations at the Military Officers Association of America, an Alexandria, Va.-based nonprofit representing some 380,000 current and former officers. For example, an E-7 who retires at age 40 would receive about $35,500 by age 62, down from about $44,000; while an O-5 who retires at age 42 would get about $63,900 by age 62, down from about $77,600, he said.

MOAA has vowed to fight the provision and already started a letter-writing campaign to lawmakers, Hayden said.

"This was a backroom deal that was made by a committee that doesn't have jurisdiction over armed services," he said. "It not only caught us by surprise, I think it caught members of Congress by surprise, especially members of the armed services committees."

Others said the overall effect on military retirees won't be that significant.

Retirees would see a roughly 10 percent decrease in retirement pay by age 61 -- and the cumulative effect of the cost-of-living adjustment would decline even more over time, according to Kevin Brancato, a defense analyst at Bloomberg Government in Washington, D.C.

"You're talking about a small decrease in the total package for a retiree's lifetime," he said in a telephone interview. "It's between four and five percent."

Meanwhile, the defense policy bill would reduce troops' pay raise in 2014 to 1 percent from 1.7 percent this year. The change means the average enlisted member would receive a monthly pay increase of $26 instead of $47, according to Pentagon budget documents.

The percentage is in line with what the Obama administration requested and the Senate Armed Services Committee already approved. While the House previously passed a 1.8 percent military pay raise for next year, it agreed to limit the increase as part of a legislative compromise.

The lower raise for military personnel was "a tough decision" for Pentagon leaders, but it allowed them to not have to thin the ranks "by thousands of additional troops on top of the drawdown already planned," according to budget documents.

The legislation would curb pay raises, but it would also reject proposed fee increases for the Tricare health care system and renew combat pay and other benefits.
From WW2 through the Vietnam war, the Zippo lighter was a valued possession among many American GIs who took the opportunity to have them engraved with artwork and personal messages. According to collectors, over 200,000 Zippos were used by GI's in Vietnam. The Zippo played a part in almost every daily activity. The shiny top provided a handy mirror and the lighters flame warmed their food at meal time.

GI's kept salt in the bottom cavities, called canned bottoms, of their Zippos, to replenish lost body salt. Other legendary Zippos were used to transmit signals or even provided a shield against enemy bullets. Staff Sergeant Naugle, who was saved because he was able to signal his position to the rescue helicopter, had a Zippo in his hand. Among men that had a close call with death, one of the luckiest was Sergeant Martinez, who kept a Zippo in his chest pocket. A bullet struck his chest, only to be stopped by his Zippo. This was reported in Life magazine and also appeared in various advertisements attesting the Zippos finest attributes.

Zippo lighters were also used in military operations, where Marines and Soldiers would spray gasoline over the area to burn enemy compounds and dwellings. A soldier would usually carry a Zippo in the chest pocket of his jungle fatigues. Some would insert one in the camouflage band of the helmet or put one into the magazine pouch of an M-16. Alcohol, diesel oil and even gasoline were substitutes for lighter fluid when this was not available. Zippos were made of tough stuff! Zippos were also used as IDs and canvasses. Post Exchanges in Vietnam carried a large amount of Zippo lighters, which explains the reason why there was so many Zippos in Vietnam.

By this time, Zippo merchandise quickly found its way onto the black market. Soldiers were able to buy brand new Zippos without having to go to the PX store. Vietnamese craftsmen would engrave anything from pictures to phrases onto the Zippo. The most popular motif engraved on a Zippo was the map of Vietnam.

Zippo lighters used by the GI's during the Vietnam War have become collector's items. Every Zippo from the war bears mute witness, conveying a great sense of having been there on the battlefield. The GI's who faced death and stood on the brink of hell, carrying their Zippos, transformed these simple lighters into an integral part of their own bodies and souls. Zippo lighters have since become valuable collectors' items commanding high prices at auctions.

**THE ZIPPO LIGHTER - A GI's BEST FRIEND**

**SOME ZIPPO INSCRIPTIONS**
Congress could reconsider military pension cut in January

A cut to military retirement pay in the budget signed Thursday by President Barack Obama has already triggered such a backlash that Congress may vote in January to toss it out.

Some lawmakers who represent districts with a military presence — and who voted for the overall budget — are vowing to overturn the pension change as soon as the House and the Senate reconvene Friday. Several House and Senate lawmakers in both parties, responding to heavy lobbying from advocates for service members and veterans, already have introduced bills that would restore full cost-of-living increases for military retirees of working age.

Reps. Rodney Davis, R-Ill., and Michael Fitzpatrick, R-Pa., have introduced a bill that would restore the annual cost-of-living adjustment for about 800,000 enlisted troops and officers who retire in their early 40s, then take other jobs outside the military. In the budget passed this month, the COLA for working-age retirees was reduced by 1 percentage point; once the retirees turn 62, they go back to receiving the full increase.

The cut is expected to save the government about $6 billion over 10 years, and it is set to be phased in over three years. Davis and Fitzpatrick’s bill would find the savings instead by asking the Internal Revenue Service to crack down on Americans who file fraudulent claims for child tax credits.

“I think we need to make the fix right now,” said Davis, whose Illinois district includes many former service members and employees at nearby Scott Air Force Base.

At a meet-and-greet with constituents in his district recently, many voters were livid at the pension cut, Davis said. To them and him, he said, the federal government is unfairly breaking a promise it made to service members.

“A lot of people joined the military and made huge sacrifices because they were promised a benefit,” he said. “To go back on that is wrong.”

Rep. Martha Roby, R-Ala., said she is partnering with Fitzpatrick on the legislation.

“I believe that this is a fix the Republican conference can rally around,” she said in a statement one day after the budget was approved. “In my opinion, it should be the first item on the docket for 2014.”

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., who is up for reelection next year, has introduced a bill to replace the $6 billion saved by the COLA cut by instead “eliminating a tax loophole for offshore corporations,” a news release from her office said.

Republican Sens. Kelly Ayotte, N.H., James Inhofe, Okla., Lindsey Graham, S.C., and others also have come out against the COLA cut.

On Dec. 23, Reps. Julia Brownley, D-Calif., and Ted Poe, R-Texas, introduced similar measures that would repeal the provision.

“As a member of the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee, I believe our servicemembers, veterans, and their families must receive the benefits they have earned and deserve,” Brownley said in a statement. “These benefits are owed to them without equivocation. That is why I have introduced legislation to repeal the military retiree COLA reduction.”

It is unclear whether either proposal includes cuts to offset the elimination of the COLA savings.

Even lawmakers who support the COLA cut agree that the provision should be changed to exempt at least disabled veterans who were forced to retire for medical reasons, as well as survivors.

The budget legislation also requires newly hired civilian federal employees to contribute more to their pensions.
Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.), chairman of the House Budget Committee, appear to be in sync in defending the controversial cap that Congress has imposed on cost-of-living adjustments for "working age" military retirees starting in January 2016.

They should be, Ryan is suggesting, because the idea for the COLA cap came to him from the Department of Defense. And the budget deal he struck will help to ease automatic defense spending cuts from sequestration that military leaders said were decimating force readiness.

Hagel and Ryan also agree, however, that it was a mistake for Ryan and his negotiating partner, Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.), chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, not to have shielded more than 100,000 service members retired on medical disability from the planned COLA caps.

Therefore, even as Congress forwarded the Bipartisan Budget Act on to President Obama to be signed into law, Ryan said he and Murray will work to amend it so it excludes those medically retired and their survivors from the COLA caps "well before" they are to take effect.

Ryan wrote this in a guest editorial in the newspaper USA Today.

At a Pentagon press conference, Hagel embraced the Ryan-Murray budget deal after it passed both the House and Senate by comfortable margins. Defense leaders, he said, are "prepared to engage the Congress in achieving compensation reform. But any changes to cost-of-living adjustments should not apply to medically disabled retirees. These retirees need to be exempted from the changes in the budget agreement."

The vast majority of retirees are non-disabled, but the COLA cap provision in the Bipartisan Budget Act makes no distinction. Unless the law is amended, COLAs for all military retirees under age 62 will be capped after 2015 at one percentage point below annual inflation as measured by the government's Consumer Price Index or CPI.

At age 62, full COLAs would be restored and annuities reset to levels retirees would have seen at that age had full COLAs been in effect since retirement. Impacted retirees, however, would never get back money lost annually before 62 under the CPI-minus-one-percent formula.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates savings to the Department of Defense of $6.3 billion over the first decade the COLA cap is in effect. The impact on individuals will vary based on rate of inflation.

For example, if an enlisted member in pay grade E-7 retirees at age 40 with an initial annuity of $23,000, and if cost of living climbs an average of three percent a year, then by age 62 the COLA capped of two percent would cut $83,000 off the total value of E-7 retired pay. However, if inflation averages two percent a year, the loss by age 62 falls to $72,000.

An officer who retires as an O-5 at age 42, with an initial annuity of $43,000, stands to lose more than $124,000 by age 62 with a CPI-minus-1 COLA, assuming average inflation of three percent. If inflation, however, averages two percent, the COLA cap would dampen retired pay for that officer by $109,000 by age 62.
Military Officers Association of America, which prepared these estimates, also produced numbers showing the effect of the COLA cap on some few members forced to retire early on medical disability.

An E-6 who retires at age 32, after 12 years of service, due to injury or illness would lose more than $45,000 in retired pay by age 62 if inflation were to average three percent. An O-3 officer medically retired at 34 after 12 years would lose more than $63,000 in retired pay by age 62.

The Senate followed the House by a week in approving the budget deal, as a dozen Republicans joined every Senate Democrat in voting for the bill despite a rising chorus of criticism from military retirees, careerists nearing retirement and by military association and veterans' groups.

The intensity of the political heat encouraged a number of lawmakers to introduce bills immediately that would replace the COLA cut with cost-cutting alternatives their constituents might find more palatable.

For instance, Sens. Mark R. Warner (D-VA) and Tim Kaine (D-VA) introduced legislation to replace the COLA cap with language that would block companies from using foreign tax havens to avoid U.S. taxes. That idea isn't popular with Republicans who oppose any kind of tax increase.

Rep. Mike Fitzpatrick (R-Pa.) instead wants to replace the COLA cuts with a bill to tighten the Refundable Child Tax Credit program so illegal immigrants can't abuse it and receive fraudulent payments. Fitzpatrick cited recent findings from the Treasury Department's inspector general of billions of dollars being paid improperly to undocumented workers.

The budget deal Ryan and Murray struck softens the effect of budget sequestration by $63 billion across 2014 and 2015, with half of it bringing budget relief to the Department of Defense. It shelves about one third of across-the-board defense spending cuts expected those years from the sequestration mechanism adopted in the 2011 Budget Control Act.

Hagel said the deal restores some predictability to defense spending near term but DoD still faces "very difficult budget decisions." With defense budgets still capped $70 billion below requested levels for 2014 and 2015, Hagel said, DoD still must make deep cuts to overhead and infrastructure costs, "tough choices on force structure" and reform military compensation.

Even as Murray moved to distance herself from the COLA cap provision in the deal she negotiated, Ryan defended it. He called current retirement benefits generous and said most retirees to be impacted by the COLA caps will be working in second careers anyway. He also echoed warnings from Hagel and the Joint Chiefs about the perils of rising personnel costs.

"For me, there's simply no choice between responsible reforms of military compensation and making what our military leadership has called 'disproportionate cuts to military readiness and modernization,' " Ryan explained. "Every time we kick the can down the road, we put our troops' combat readiness at risk."
INDIANAPOLIS (December 26, 2013) -- Handwritten Christmas cards from schoolchildren were denied distribution to veterans at the Dallas VA Medical Center this week because they referenced the holiday by name, and American Legion National Commander Daniel M. Dellinger is not happy about it. Neither is the Liberty Institute, which has sided with the Legion in opposing a number of other attempts to prevent free expression of speech and religion. Also this week, the VA hospital in Augusta, Ga., announced a new policy that turned away high-school students who intended to sing Christmas carols to veterans, as they traditionally have in past years. And in Iowa City, American Legion members were told they could not hand out presents to veterans if the wrapping paper said Merry Christmas, a problem they solved by filtering the gifts through the VA chaplain.

The American Legion has asked VA Central Office for an explanation of why it appears that Christians are being singled out for restrictions, especially when the holiday honors the birth of Jesus Christ. “First of all, VA’s decision to prohibit the delivery of Christmas cards that mention Christmas is ludicrous,” Dellinger said today after Texas teacher Susan Chapman was told Monday that her students’ cards would not be delivered to veterans. “Second of all, VA has been down this road before, and recently. VA has been warned through a federal court decree to stop denying freedom of religious expression at its facilities. It’s pretty obvious the Dallas VA did not get that memo.”

When high school singers arrived last Friday at the Augusta, Ga., VA Medical Center, officials reportedly gave them a list of 12 approved, secular holiday songs. Unprepared to sing them, the students opted not to perform. “That’s censorship, pure and simple,” Dellinger said of the rejected carolers. “Every Christmas, every religious holiday, Christians are more and more often targeted for censorship and restriction at VA facilities. Veterans in these hospitals fought to protect such freedoms.”

Chapman, the wife of a U.S. military veteran, has requested that the Dallas VA Medical Center immediately rescind its discriminatory policy and allow her and her students – and any others in the future – to distribute Christmas cards that say “Merry Christmas” or “God Bless You” or mention Jesus. Writing to VA Secretary Eric Shinseki and VA North Texas Health System Director Jeffery L. Milligan, Liberty Institute set a deadline of Friday, Dec. 27, for confirmation in writing “that Mrs. Chapman and her students may distribute cards that contain the phrase ‘Merry Christmas,’ ‘God Bless You,’ or that contain other religious references to veterans at the Medical Center and at all other VA hospitals, and that the holiday card policies of the Department and the Medical Center (are) brought in line with applicable law.”

“Of course, for this year’s schoolchildren, it’s a little late, and that’s really disappointing,” said Dellinger, who leads the 2.4-million-member American Legion, largest veterans organization in the country. “VA needs to let those children deliver cards to the veterans now, and those who wrongly banned them owe an apology to the children, the teacher and the veterans who were supposed to get them Monday. This is a clear case of discrimination on the basis of religious expression; the courts have already ruled that such policies are unconstitutional. The American Legion fully concurs with that interpretation.”
The Bipartisan Budget Act that Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., and I drafted will soon become law. We think it’s a small step toward fiscal discipline in Washington. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office estimates the bill will reduce the deficit over the next ten years by over $20 billion. And unlike current law, it will provide much-needed relief to our already strained defense budget.

One part of the bill has become particularly controversial: the reduction in cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) for working-age military retirees. The federal government has no greater obligation than to keep the American people safe and we must take care of the men and women in uniform who put their lives on the line. For that reason, Congress is understandably hesitant to make changes to military compensation.

But even hesitance has a cost. The need for reform is undeniable. Since 2001, excluding the costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the cost per service member in the active-duty force has risen by 41% in inflation-adjusted dollars.

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, a combat vet himself, has said "that we can no longer put off military compensation reform. DOD’s leadership, Chairman Dempsey, the service chiefs, the service secretaries, and myself, we all know that we need to slow cost growth in military compensation. Otherwise, we’ll have to make disproportionate cuts to military readiness and modernization."

Here’s what the new law will do. We make no changes for those currently at or above age 62. This reform affects only younger military retirees. Right now, any person who has served 20 years can retire — regardless of age. That means a serviceman who enlists at 18 becomes eligible for retirement at 38. The late 30s and early 40s are prime working years, and most of these younger retirees go on to second careers.

All this reform does is make a small adjustment for those younger retirees. If they retire before age 62, the annual increase in their retired pay will be 1% less than the inflation rate. In other words, their benefits will grow every year — just at a slower rate. And when the retiree hits 62, DOD will recalculate the retired pay so that it will be where it would have been if he or she had received the full inflation adjustment every year since he or she retired.

Here’s an example: If a serviceman enlisted at 18 and retired at 38, under this policy his lifetime benefit would be about $1.7 million instead of $1.8 million. For a service member who retired at the average military retirement age of 44, the difference would be smaller, about $30,000 over his or her lifetime. This is a far more modest reform than other bipartisan proposals, some of which would have fully eliminated the adjustments for inflation for working-age retirees.

And to be clear, the money we save from this reform will go right back to the military. Veterans aren’t Washington’s piggy bank. They deserve fair compensation. And we owe them a benefit structure they can count on.

That said, when Congress was considering the bill, many raised concerns that these reforms would affect the retired pay of service members who are medically retired and those receiving survivor’s benefits. So Senator Murray and I have agreed to amend the law to exclude them well before the reform takes effect in December 2015.

But I stand behind the need for reform. In 2012, Congress established the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission to examine the entire military-compensation system from top to bottom. The commission’s recommendations are due in May, and the leaders of the armed-services committees in Congress have agreed to consider their recommendations and look for other ways to reform the system. That’s why this reform does not take effect until the end of 2015 — it gives Congress ample time to consider alternatives.

For me, there's simply no choice between responsible reforms of military compensation and making what our military leadership has called "disproportionate cuts to military readiness and modernization." Every time we kick the can down the road, we put our troops’ combat readiness at risk. This agreement put forward one reform option, and I invite others to do the same.

Our troops have been willing to sacrifice everything for this country. We owe it to them to give them the best equipment on the battlefield and a secure retirement when they come home.

Military compensation reform controversy simply can't deter us from doing the right thing.
On Monday, December 9, the Employment and Education Division met with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to discuss the 'Returning Veterans to Agriculture Project.' This pilot program will be spearheaded and implemented through a partnership with Purdue University, which will include many resource partners. USDA has reached out to The American Legion to discuss ways that we can work together in ensuring that the implementation will be a success.

On Tuesday, December 10, the Employment and Education Division met with Representative Julia Brownley's (CA) office regarding support for her bill that seeks to extend the work opportunity tax credits to businesses for hiring veterans for 5 years and streamline the claims process. The bill would also permit certain small businesses and nonprofit organizations to claim the tax credit via payroll deductions.

From Monday, December 9 - Wednesday, December 11, the Employment and Education Division has been hosting our new chairwoman, Denise Rohan (WI). We've discussed all things employment and education, which includes training, credentialing, small business development, housing, veterans' preference, and homelessness. Chairwoman Rohan has been briefed by VA, SBA, and our Small Business Task Force, along with the other divisions at the DC office.

On Thursday, December 12, the Employment and Education Division is attending the grand opening of United States Veterans Initiative (U.S.VETS) office in Washington, DC. U.S.VETS is the nation's largest nonprofit that is serving the unique needs of at-risk and/or homeless veterans. A division staff member is on the Advisory Council for U.S.VETS DC office.

From Wednesday, December 11 - Friday, December 13, the Employment and Education Division is participating in a site visit to the Colorado State University Global campus. On that visit, the division staff member (along with Legionnaires from the Dept. of Colorado) will meet with key staff and faculty members to discuss programs/services for student-veterans on their campus in Greenwood Village, Colorado.

This week planning for Hiring our Heroes hiring events continued for Albuquerque, Austin, Detroit, Milwaukee, Oklahoma City, and Springfield, Illinois.

Staff met with General James F. Amos and Marine Corps Leadership at the Pentagon for a day-long briefing on the state of The Marine Corps and how the VSO's can work to assist the mission of the Corps.

On Thursday, December 5, Legislative staff participated in Government Accountability Office (GAO) research in conjunction with staff from Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation (VA&R). The GAO is fulfilling a provision of P.L. 113-6 which directed it to examine rural veteran access to national cemeteries. Although overall the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) received the most positive reviews of any branch of VA, there are concerns among rural veterans – particularly in western states such as Nevada, Wyoming, Colorado and others – that VA's current models for national cemetery placement do not meet the needs of veterans in those areas. Legion staff discussed in depth the issues associated with cemetery placement with the GAO staff.
The American Legion testified on December 11 before a joint session of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations and the House Small Business Subcommittee on Contracting and Workforce. The subject of the hearing was “Contracting Away Accountability: Reverse Auctions in Federal Agency Acquisitions.” Our organization was concerned the use of reverse auctions was undermining the federal procurement system.

Legislative staff attended a Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing on December 11 updating VA’s progress in reducing the backlog. VA Undersecretary Alison Hickey testified for VA.

On December 11 Legislative staff met with House Veterans’ Affairs Committee minority staff about potential upcoming legislation that affects veterans benefits.

Legislative staff on December 11 attended a meeting of the Senate Defense Communities Caucus. This group, a bipartisan group of lawmakers, provides a unified voice for the hundreds of communities that host active and closed installations, support those communities in their efforts to assist service members and their families, and raise awareness of the unique issues and challenges facing defense communities. The caucuses serve as a liaison among Congress, DOD and the private sector and advance dialogue on issues important to defense communities, such as defense infrastructure, innovative partnerships that strengthen communities and enhance installation efficiency, renewable energy projects, and military families/veterans support.

Legislative staff will meet Friday December 13th with the Senate Backlog Working Group, a bipartisan group of senators concerned about reducing VA’s backlog of disability claims, and to discuss potential proposals for legislative fixes to the backlog. This is an early stage meeting, but legislation could be drafted based on the input provided.

Legislative staff will receive an update this week from Representative Nick Rahall’s (WV) staff regarding the current situation on H.R. 2841, Guard and Reserve Equal Access to Health Act, which directs the Secretary of the military department concerned to provide a physical examination to each member of a reserve component who: (1) will not otherwise receive one through that department, and (2) elects to receive such examination. Requires the Secretary concerned to: (1) provide such examination during the 90-day period before such member's scheduled date of separation, and (2) provide such member with a record of the examination. After the meeting a discussion on further action will occur. The bill now has 12 cosponsors.

The Senate has returned from its recess and the FY 2014 NDAA (H.R. 1960/S. 1197) is back up for debate. Legislative staff will continue to follow the debate regarding any discussion of Legion-specific provisions, e.g., TRICARE. [Resolutions 24-2012, 29-2012, 61-2012, 70-2012, 72-2012, 73-2012, 142-2012, 154-2012, 156-2012, 31-2012 Fall, 55-2012 Fall, 34-2013]

On Thursday, December 5, staff attended the Human Rights First Beacon Prize dinner in Washington, DC. The Beacon Prize is awarded annually during the Human Rights Summit in Washington, DC to an individual or organization whose work embodies the best in the tradition of American leadership on human rights. This year’s honoree was former Senator Bob Dole.

On Saturday December 7, staff participated in the annual Pearl Harbor Day Program at the Greenbelt Post 136 in Maryland. Among other speakers, John Stovall provided a national security update.

Last night, Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) announced a budget agreement that provides $63 billion in "sequester relief" over the next two years, split evenly between defense and non-defense programs. The across-the-board spending cuts will partly be paid for by raising fees on airline tickets. It also requires businesses to pay higher premiums to the federal government to guarantee their pension benefits. And those under age 62 who retired from the military will see a slightly smaller annual cost-of-living increase. http://politi.co/19AA7ZN
Thursday December 12th staff will be visiting with Senator Jeff Flake's office in Washington on passing the CRPD (Disabilities Treaty). It is hoped that the treaty will enter committee markup by December 16.

On Friday, December 6, 2014, Staff participated in a briefing and tour of the National Intrepid Center of Excellence (NICOE) and the 7-East inpatient TBI unit to visit with service members suffering from Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). The unit on 7-East focuses on moderate to severe TBI patients and the NICOE focuses on intensive outpatient treatments and therapies for mild to moderate TBI patients. The NICOE patients are still on active-duty and functioning at a level that is below full capacity and that have completed their combat duty.

On December 9, 2013, The American Legion's System Worth Saving Task Force hosted a Town Hall Meeting at American Legion Post #94 215 Maple Street, Leavenworth, KS 66048 for veterans to discuss the Dwight D. Eisenhower VA Medical Center. During the meeting, the Task Force will focus on VA's accomplishments and progress over the past ten years, current issues and concerns as well as VA's five-year strategic plan for several program areas, such as: campus alignment, staffing, enrollment/outreach, hospital programs (e.g. mental health, intensive care unit (ICU), long-term services and support, homelessness programs) information technology and construction programs.

On December 9, 2013, The American Legion's System Worth Saving Task Force is hosting a Town Hall Meeting at 7pm at American Legion Post #16 WV to discuss the Huntington VA Medical Center. During the meeting, the Task Force focused on VA's accomplishments and progress over the past ten years, current issues and concerns as well as VA's five-year strategic plan for several program areas, such as: campus alignment, staffing, enrollment/outreach, hospital programs (e.g. mental health, intensive care unit, long-term services and support, homelessness programs) information technology and construction programs.

From December 11-12, 2013, The American Legion's System Worth Saving Task Force is conducting a site visit of the Huntington VA Medical Center in Huntington, West Virginia. During the visit, the Task Force will focus on VA's accomplishments and progress over the past ten years, current issues and concerns as well as VA's five-year strategic plan for several program areas, such as: VA's budget, campus alignment, staffing, enrollment/outreach, hospital programs (e.g. mental health, intensive care unit (ICU), long-term services and support, homelessness programs) information technology and construction programs.

On Tuesday, December 10, 2013, national staff met with individuals from the Department of Justice's Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) program. RECA is a program available to veterans and contractors exposed to radiation exposure from atmospheric testing. Consideration for inclusion in DSO school is being offered as this may be an alternative method to advocate for veterans with this exposure.
Army bears brunt of DOD's reductions in Europe

U.S. Army Europe bore the lion’s share of Pentagon moves to shrink its European force in 2013, but some of its communities rebounded or even grew as the force rebalanced.

Baumholder, a community on life support after the 170th Infantry Brigade cased its colors there in 2012, bounced back as soldiers from the 16th Sustainment Brigade and other units moved in from bases that are closing.

Wiesbaden, which in 2011 lost its biggest tenant — the 1st Armored Division headquarters — got an even bigger replacement when U.S. Army Europe’s headquarters moved in the spring.

On the losing end of that transaction was Heidelberg, USAREUR’s headquarters since 1952. Not only did the Army move out, but NATO’s Allied Force Command, which shared Campbell Barracks with USAREUR, deactivated, leaving Heidelberg without a military presence for the first time since World War II.

Altogether, USAREUR gave up a dozen installations in 2013, six from the Heidelberg garrison alone. Five more came from neighboring Mannheim, which will close entirely once replacements for the military prison and network switching center there are finished. An Army facility at the port in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, also closed.

Meanwhile Bamberg and Schweinfurt, slated for closure in 2014, were decimated by inactivations and relocations. Of the units left in those communities, all but one will inactivate in the next year. The surviving unit, an engineer company, will return to the United States.

Those unit inactivations are relatively small potatoes compared with the loss of two of USEUR’s major subordinate units. V Corps, which had survived earlier plans to close it down, inactivated in June after 62 years of continuous service in Europe and shortly after returning from its second deployment in Afghanistan.

At the other end of the longevity spectrum, the 172nd Infantry Brigade inactivated after just five years in Germany. While the unit didn’t have a long history in Europe, it was the only active Army unit on the continent still armed with main battle tanks. With its inactivation, the last U.S. tanks were shipped home from Europe — a milestone after seven decades of American armor presence on the continent.

According to USAREUR, the command started 2013 with about 35,000 soldiers and will end the year with about 30,000. By 2017, the Army’s footprint might cover as few as 58 installations in seven main communities.

The Air Force sent the only squadron of A-10 close air support jets it had in Europe back to the U.S. and inactivated its 603rd Air Control Squadron at Aviano Air Base, Italy.

The departure of the A-10s from Spangdahlem, Germany, leaves six squadrons of U.S. fighter aircraft in Europe — two in Italy, one in Germany and three in England.
BOOKING – Department of Europe – VFW Convention 2014

Please reserve the following:

**Guest Details:**

Lastname:

Firstname:

Street:

ZIP / City:

State:

Telephone:

Telefax:

Email:

**Room reservation:**

Arrival Date:

Departure Date:

Room Type: 0 EUR 51.00 per Single room / night

0 EUR 81.00 per Double room / night

Children (0-11 years) sharing parent’s room free of charge without extra bed
**Banquet - reservation:**

13. June 2014: 0 x EUR 16.00 per person for LUNCH-Buffet
                0 x EUR 21.00 per person for DINNER-Buffet

14. June 2014: 0 x EUR 16.00 per person for LUNCH-Buffet
                0 x EUR 32.00 per person for BANQUET Dinner-Buffet

15. June 2014: 0 x EUR 16.00 per person for LUNCH-Buffet

**Conditions:**

**Cancellation deadline:** A cancellation free of charge is till 10th May 2013 possible.

In case of cancellation after 10th May 2013 we reserve the right to charge 90% of the expected revenue.

**Child Policy:**
- Childs until 03 years are free of charge
- Childs from 3-12 years will pay 50% of the price for the buffet
- Childs up to 12 years should pay 100% of the price for the buffet

**Booking guarantee:**

**Credit card Details:**
- Credit Card: __________________
- Card Owner: ________________
- Card Number: ________________
- Valid: __________

**For Hotel use only:**

Herewith we re-confirm the above mentioned booking:

Reservation Number: