



***Sons of The American Legion***  
**National Executive Committee**

**Minutes of the  
National Commission and  
National Committee Meetings**

**October 1-2, 2021**

**Sheraton Indianapolis City Centre Hotel  
Indianapolis, Indiana**



## Legislative Commission

### Opening:

The meeting was called to order at 10:23 AM on October 2, 2021 in the Circle East Room of the Sheraton Indianapolis City Centre Hotel by Chairman Thomas G. Deal (MD, 2023).

### Roll Call:

Chairman:	<u>Thomas G. Deal (MD, 2023)</u>	Members:	<u>David Lee (NY, 2022) – Excused</u>
Vice Chairman:	<u>Blair Miles (AL, 2024)</u>		<u>Richard Humphrey (CO, 2022) – Absent</u>
Secretary:	<u>Jeffrey E. Hicks (NJ)</u>		<u>Bernie Kessler (OH, 2023)</u>
	National Assistant Adjutant		<u>David Rippe (NE, 2024) – Resigned</u>
Liaison:	<u>Michael Moss (CO) – Absent</u>		<u>David Sousa (NV, 2024) – To be approved</u>
	Past National Commander	P.R. Liaison	
Guests:	<u>Robert Bascou (NJ); Joe Wysochanski (PA); Don Hall, Jr. (MD); Ray Jarvis (NY); H. Larry Steele (MT); and Mark McCue (MA); 10:30 AM - Greg Spaulding (IN); 10:49 AM – William D. Kelly (FL)</u>		

**Opening Prayer:** Vice Chairman Blair Miles (AL, 2024) invoked the blessing of God.

**Pledge of Allegiance:** Led by Chairman Deal (MD).

**Introductions:** Led by Chairman Deal (MD). Both Commission members and meeting attendees went around the room and introduced themselves. Those in attendance so noted above. David Lee (NY) was at the Commander’s Class, so he was excused. Chairman Deal (MD) introduced National Assistant Adjutant Hicks (NJ) as the Commission’s new Secretary, the successor for David Ridenour (IL), who retired as a National Assistant Adjutant at the 2021 National Convention in Phoenix, AZ, after many years of service to the National SAL.

### Reports of Members:

None given at this time.

### Old Business:

Chairman Deal (MD) spoke on the **George B. Evans Grassroots Advocate of the Year Award**. Gilbert Mares from Hollywood Squadron 43, Detachment of California, won the award for last year and was announced on stage at National Convention in Phoenix. We need more nominees this year. Since Gilbert could not attend National Convention in Phoenix, Chairman Deal (MD) hoped to present the award to Gilbert on Sunday, October 3, 2021, at the closing session of the 2021 Fall NEC meeting.

Chairman Deal (MD) continued to report on the **VoterVOICE Action Center**, [www.votervoice.net/americanlegion/home](http://www.votervoice.net/americanlegion/home) If you go to The American Legion voterVOICE site, you will see 5 Action Items that you can very easily send Congress and your representatives asking for their support. They are:

1. Tell your Senators and Representatives to Support Buddy Check Week, S.4657/H.R.2898 today. Campaign to encourage members to email their representatives and senators in support of a bill that would require VA to designate one week a year as Buddy Check Week (modeled directly after TAL Buddy Check Program).
2. Provide for Veterans Affected by Toxic Exposure, S952 This past year we talked a lot about The Presumptive Benefits for War Fighters Exposed to Burn Pits and Other Toxins Act would cover a wide range of cancers and respiratory illnesses as presumptive conditions, including: asthma that was diagnosed after service, head cancer of any type, neck cancer of any type, respiratory cancer of any type, gastrointestinal cancer of any type, reproductive cancer of any type, lymphoma cancer of any type, lymphomatic cancer of any type, kidney cancer, brain cancer, melanoma, chronic bronchitis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, constrictive bronchiolitis or obliterative bronchiolitis, emphysema, granulomatous disease, interstitial lung disease, pleuritis, pulmonary fibrosis, sarcoidosis.



3. Open the VA to all WWII Veterans The Veterans Health Care Eligibility Act of 1996 exempted all veterans who served during the Mexican Border Period and World War I from the means test required to enter the VA health care system. It is time to do the same for our World War II veterans.
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4. Demand the GI Bill for Reserve and National Guard
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5. Share the American Legion's Legislative Priorities with your members of congress

In the absence of Commission member David Lee (NY), Chairman Deal (MD) inquired from those in attendance how many had registered for VoterVOICE Action Center? How many have received notice about the five (5) legislative items above? Nobody in attendance received the notices. Most had registered for VoterVOICE but are not receiving notices about important legislation pending in Congress. Chairman Deal (MD) was concerned that The American Legion may not be including the SAL on these notices. Need to confirm.

National Assistant Adjutant Hicks (NJ) informed Chairman Deal (MD) of the following items that lingered from the Spring 2021 NEC meeting minutes for the Commission's renewed consideration:

Discussion about slides - they have some old ones that were submitted to strategic planning. David Lee (NY) said they have someone that was interested in updating them and asked if he could let the process get started and make it look new. Chairman Deal (MD) said that he was interested if he wanted to do it. He will get the old slides to him so he can change them, update them, and add to them. [Follow-up: Chairman Deal (MD) stated the slides are in progress as far as he knew. No new update to provide.]

Chairman Deal (MD) said that S.A.L. Resolution 12 – Fall, 2020 regarding call-in approval for the S.A.L National Chaplain to the Washington Conference was returned to the Commission by the N.E.C. at the Fall Meeting, pending the outcome of The American Legion's call-ins review. [Follow-up: Chairman Deal (MD) stated the resolution was pulled by the Legislative Commission and would not be going forward.]

Bernie Kessler (OH, 2023) questioned the future status of Resolution 12 – Fall, 2020 after learning what was said at the Opening Session of the Fall 2021 NEC meeting earlier this morning, whereby the Legion is allowing the SAL to have more leeway to run its own operations but would remain a program of the Legion. Chairman Deal (MD) agreed that knowing what we just learned earlier today, there may be renewed hope for Resolution 12. Time will certainly tell. Chairman Deal (MD) revealed that only the chairman and vice chairman of Legislation received a call-in for Washington Conference. All other Commission members attend out-of-pocket. There is much to do at Washington Conference that requires the entire Commission to be present, not just the chairman and vice chairman. Finance was not the cause for withdrawing the resolution. The issue was that the Legion wanted the Commission to give up a call-in to an NEC meeting in exchange for a call-in to Washington Conference. The Commission believed this counterproposal was not in its favor, so the resolution was withdrawn.

#### **New Business:**

Chairman Deal (MD) discussed the following items:

The Legislative Commission received **new goals for this year** from National Commander Fox (CA). **Legislative Goal 1:** Increase Detachment Legislative Commissions; **Goal 2:** Increase submissions to 20 for the George B. Evans Veterans Advocate of the Year Award; **Goal 3:** Increase SAL participation in the Washington Conference and plan another event. In 2019, 29 Detachments participated in Washington Conference.

**Washington Conference will be Sunday, February 27 – Wednesday, March 2, 2022, with the tours on Sunday, February 27, 2022.** Bus schedule draft is submitted, and we would like some feedback. Meetings Monday, Commanders call and know before you go on Tuesday. Commander's Testimonial to Congress on Wednesday. Full schedule will be published closer to conference. There will again be a group tram pass at Arlington. Regular rate is \$15 per person. Group rate is \$11 per person. Group tram pass will be given out as a group, so we can bypass the sales office window.



Greg Spaulding (IN) commented that it should be stressed to all Arlington visitors that they need to **bring a government issued photo identification**. Without one, visitors will not gain entry. Greg recommended the photo id requirement be indicated on the reservation form to get the word out.

Wreaths cost the same \$150.00 each. Box Lunches are still \$8.00. Form needs to be submitted by Thursday, February 10, 2022. **No form nor check, no wreath, no lunch.**

Conference Calls are Bi-monthly on the 1st Thursday of month in December, February, April, June, and August. **Call-in numbers are (712) 775-7031 | Access Code: 988 284 103#** | Chairman Deal (MD) believed the start time would 7:00 PM Eastern Time, but this needed to be confirmed. No call in October since so close to the Fall 2021 NEC Meeting. Meeting schedule to be broadcasted across the country via email.

A bill before Congress is Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2021. Bill S.189 — 117th Congress (2021-2022). This bill has been sent to the President's Office for signature on September 27, 2021. This bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to increase the amounts payable for wartime disability compensation, additional compensation for dependents, the clothing allowance for certain disabled veterans, and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses and children. Specifically, the VA must increase the amounts by the same percentage as the cost-of-living increase in benefits for Social Security recipients that is effective on December 1, 2021. The bill requires the VA to publish the amounts payable, as increased, in the Federal Register. The VA is authorized to make a similar adjustment to the rates of disability compensation payable to persons who have not received compensation for service-connected disability or death. Please take time to thank your senators and representatives for their support on this bill.

Vice Chairman Blair Miles (AL, 2024) announced that he would be the Detachment of Alabama's legislative representative.

Commission Member Bernie Kessler (OH, 2023) reminded about next year's midterm elections. He suggested focusing on the candidates running for office to get our message of support for veterans out into the political arena. Research their legislative agenda. See what the candidates' legislative priorities are. Follow their candidacies.

Don Hall, Jr. (MD) exited the meeting room at 10:45 AM.

Commission Member Bernie Kessler (OH, 2023) spoke about Ohio Congressman Anthony Gonzalez, Republican, and his decision not to seek re-election. He voted to impeach Trump. Ohio Senator Rob Portman, Republican, decided not to seek re-election and now there are about seven (7) candidates running for his open seat in the Primary. Not to mention, several Democrats have thrown their names into the ring also.

Ray Jarvis (NY) mentioned that some states are in the process or will be soon redistricting congressional districts based on the 2020 Census. New York will be losing either one (1) to two (2) congressional seats due to redistricting. Greg Spaulding (IN) announced that Indiana will be redistricting. Ray Jarvis (NY) thought that Florida was gaining a congressional seat.

#### **Resolutions:**

None

#### **For the Good of the Sons of The American Legion:**

At 10:49 AM, National Commander Michael Fox (CA) addressed the Commission. He acknowledged a lot of changes happening at the National SAL level. Hopefully for the better. Our SAL program cannot sit idle and yet hope to progress into the future in a positive direction. We can learn a great deal from change if we have an open mind and are willing to step out of our comfort zone. Speaking of changes, Commander Fox emphasized the goals set forth for the Legislative Commission this year. As an example, the SAL program could be doing more at Washington Conference. We need to balance our business meetings with community engagement. If we need more buses at Washington Conference, Commander Fox pledged to do whatever he can to help facilitate that request.

Chairman Deal (MD) informed Commander Fox that he was actively looking for cemeteries (outside of Arlington) in the Washington, D.C. area to place flags on those veterans' graves while at the Washington Conference.



William D. Kelly (FL), having arrived at the end of the meeting, spoke on legislative initiatives being pursued in Florida. Unfortunately, Bill can no longer serve on the Legislative Commission due to his new role as the NEC for the Detachment of Florida. But Bill still pledged to be on the Legislative calls throughout the year to stay abreast of new legislative efforts.

William D. Kelly (FL) provided a brief update on J. J. Jennings' health status. The Commission was thinking about him and wished him well with his recovery.

**Closing:**

With no further business to consider, Chairman Thomas G. Deal (MD, 2023) adjourned the meeting  
at 10:59 AM .