

VIRGINIA LEGIONNAIRE

Official E- Newsletter For The Virginia Department (.pdf version)

June 2009 Edition

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Upcoming Events!

2009 State Convention July 9-12 - Sheraton Richmond West, Richmond
\$94

State Baseball Tournament July 27-Aug 1
RF&P Park, Glen Allen, Virginia

2009 Leadership College August 7-9 Holiday Inn Koger Center
Richmond \$89

2009 Fall Conference October 30-November 1 - Holiday Inn, Hampton
\$71.00

2010 State Convention July 8-11 - Sheraton Richmond West, Richmond
\$99

2010 Fall Conference October 29-31 Holiday Inn, Hampton
\$74

2011 State Convention July 14-17 Roanoke Plaza Hotel & Holiday Inn, Roanoke

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President Obama Agrees With The American Legion For Suppression of Detainee Photos

WASHINGTON (May 13, 2009) -- In the wake of strong arguments advanced by The American Legion, the top U.S. commander in Iraq, Gen. Ray Odierno, and some members of Congress, President Barack Obama has moved to block the release of controversial photographs depicting the abuse of detainees in Iraqi and Afghan prisons.

The photographs were to have been made public by May 28th by Pentagon agreement in response to a court-upheld ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) Freedom of Information Act request.

But, according to news sources, President Obama met with his legal team, telling them that he was uncomfortable with the release of the photographs because their viewing could endanger U.S. troops and compromise national security.

The President's reported meeting nearly coincided with the publication in the Wall Street Journal of an op-ed piece by National Commander David Rehbein of The American Legion raising these same objections. The White House announcement today was made just a couple of hours before the commander was to meet with U.S. Representative Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) and national security experts to discuss ways of persuading the Administration to block the photos' release.

"This is the very best news we could hear," said Cmdr. Rehbein upon learning of the President's decision, "and we applaud the President for his response to those, like The American Legion, who are putting the welfare of our troops and our country ahead of political considerations."

The American Legion, celebrating its 90th year in existence this year, is the nation's largest veterans' service organization with 2.6 million members. Its website address is www.legion.org.

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My Favorite Time of the Year!

By John Kokernak, Department Americanism Chairman

Well the April showers have ended and the May flowers are definitely in bloom. The leaves are back on the trees and the grass is very green and growing like gangbusters after all that rain.

And this is my favorite time of the year! I know that many posts have already submitted their Americanism, Children and Youth, Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation and Consolidated Post Reports. My thanks to those posts that have taken the time to document the outstanding and amazing efforts to support our veterans, their families and our communities. If you have not already do so, please submit your reports! It's not too late to get them in so we can tell Commander Les Clevinger that Virginia has completed 100% Post Reporting.

I know from past experience that it takes a lot of effort to complete those reports and in a time when there is a lot of other things going on, it is often difficult to find the time to collect the information and put it in the proper report format. The only suggestion that I can make it is to consider recording the information at your monthly meetings. If you have your members report their hours every month at your post meeting, you can capture this information when it is fresh in their minds and it may help you doing a better job of reporting everything that you do. It also makes it easier when you can consolidate the information all year long and just do the last month or two when the reports are due.

Now back to my original comment about this being my favorite time of the year. If you have ever had the honor and privilege of reading through all the reports that the posts submit, you will be amazed by all the activities that our Legionnaires do around the Commonwealth of Virginia. I know that it has amazed me so far and I have only started working my way through the large stack of reports. That is why it is my favorite time of the year.

Another reason that this is my favorite time of the year is that the warm weather is here! And that means it is time to get outside after being cooped up in the house all winter! It also means that the “boys of summer” are back! That’s right, American Legion Baseball teams are conducting practices and the schedule is about to begin! Flag Day is just around the corner on June 14th and there will be many posts out there honoring “Old Glory” and making sure she is displayed properly. For those flags that have seen their better days, they will be honorably retired with respect in many Post Flag Retirement Ceremonies. The month of June also means that the schools will be letting the kids out for the summer and that American Legion Boys State and American Legion Auxiliary Girls State will be held from June 21-27, 2009 to learn about our Virginia State Government. Plus to top all that, the Fourth of July is just around the corner!

Now that’s Americanism! All we need now is a backyard cookout or a county fair and Old Glory flying in the breeze on a sunny afternoon. As I said earlier in the year, “America! What a country!” And I still mean it!

My thanks to our veterans who have given us that precious freedom to do what we can in this country and I hope that you honored them over the Memorial Day Weekend! Please also remember those brave men and women who are out there today preserving our freedoms and helping others obtain the freedom that we have.

My thanks again to all of you for everything that you do to support our veterans, their families and our communities! Please keep up the good work!

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Staffing Realignment at Virginia’s State-Operated Veterans Cemeteries

RICHMOND—The Virginia Department of Veterans Services has reorganized staffing and administration of the two state-operated cemeteries at Suffolk and Amelia. The realignment was made in response to an imbalance in the workloads at the two cemeteries as well as decreased funding.

On average, the Virginia Veterans Cemetery, Amelia, conducts more than 200 burials annually. In contrast, the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery located in Suffolk conducts more than 600 burials annually. Yet, for the past two years, both cemeteries have had identical administrative staffing: each has an office manager and an administrator. Although the Horton Cemetery has an additional vacant administrator position, the agency lacks funding to fill the position.

As a result, DVS has reassessed staffing for the two cemeteries as well as a third cemetery under construction in Dublin. The reorganization will align personnel levels based on volume of burials. The Horton Cemetery will be staffed with an office manager, a full-time administrator, and a part-time administrator. The cemeteries at Amelia and Dublin will be each staffed with a full-time administrator and a part-time administrator.

“This new streamlined approach will enable the agency to redistribute its existing cemetery resources and augment staffing at the high-volume Horton Cemetery,” explained DVS Commissioner Vince Burgess. “As a result, we will make more effective use of the staffing at the cemetery at Amelia and ensure that the new cemetery at Dublin is adequately staffed but not over staffed.”

The plan went into effect May 1, 2009.

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The Wall Street Journal May 8, 2009

Photos That Could Cost Lives

There Is Nothing To Be Learned From More Images Of Detainee Abuse.

By [DAVID K. REHBEIN](#)

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but is it worth the death of a single American soldier? Is any photograph worth the life of your Marine Corps daughter? Or your neighbor's deployed husband?

At issue is the Pentagon's decision -- in response to a Freedom of Information Act request from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) -- to release a "substantial number" of images depicting the treatment of detainees by May 28 after being ordered by a judge on the U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals in New York to do so. But given the riots that occurred after the release of the first round of Abu Ghraib photos and the enemy's penchant for using such images for propaganda and recruiting purposes, the Defense Department owes it to the soldiers to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court in order to block the release of these photos.

Gen. Richard B. Myers, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, voiced his concern about the dangers of releasing photos in 2005. "It is probable that al Qaeda and other groups will seize upon these images and videos as grist for their propaganda mill, which will result in, besides violent attacks, increased terrorist recruitment, continued financial support and exacerbation of tensions between Iraqi and Afghani populaces and U.S. and coalition forces," he said in a statement in support of the Pentagon's efforts to oppose the ACLU's request. He added, "riots, violence and attacks by insurgents will result."

I was deeply disturbed by the images of Abu Ghraib. The military, however, has investigated the abuses and punished those involved. Moreover, the photographs that are now about to be released are already being used for investigative purposes. Other than self-flagellation by certain Americans, riots and future terrorist acts, what else do people expect will come from the release of these photographs?

Sen. Kit Bond (R., Mo.) warned of serious repercussions recently on "Fox News Sunday." "I don't think there's any question it will endanger all of us, because I think it will enhance recruitment for all kinds of terrorists willing to come after us," he said.

Whether or not the photographs contribute to another attack on American soil remains to be seen. We do know, however, that it will be our troops who will most likely pay the price. We hope that others in Congress heed Mr. Bond's concerns and not politicize a dangerous issue.

This is not so much a matter of "the people's right to know" as it is a matter of needlessly endangering the lives of our brave troops -- 99% of whom have had no role in any interrogations or allegations of detainee abuse.

As commander of the nation's largest veterans service organization, I have had the honor to present Blue Star Banners to military families, with the Blue Star signifying the deployment of a service

member. It is always a moving experience. But it is the Gold Star Banner, the star that signifies the death of a service member in war, that I never hope to present. I fear that there will be many Gold Stars as a result of this misbegotten policy.

Mr. Rehbein is National Commander of The American Legion.

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**JOIN CO-HOSTS GARY SINISE AND JOE MANTEGNA FOR
THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE *NATIONAL MEMORIAL DAY CONCERT*:
A TRIBUTE TO THE SACRIFICE OF AMERICA'S SERVICEMEN AND WOMEN**

- Live National Television Event from the U.S. Capitol on PBS stars General Colin Powell, Katie Holmes, Laurence Fishburne, Dianne Wiest, Katharine McPhee, Trace Adkins, Brian Stokes Mitchell, Colm Wilkinson, Denyce Graves, Lang Lang, Robert McDuffie, Maestro Erich Kunzel and the National Symphony Orchestra -

Washington, DC, April 8, 2009 - On Memorial Day weekend, PBS will unite our nation with an evening that has become an American tradition. The multi award-winning ***National Memorial Day Concert*** honors the service and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform, their families at home and all those who have given their lives for our country. The 2009 event commemorates 20 years on air as the nation's memorial service, offering viewers a time to remember, to heal and bring our country together. The program is co-hosted for the fourth year by Emmy Award-winner **Gary Sinise** (*CSI:New York*) and Tony Award-winner **Joe Mantegna** (*Criminal Minds*), two acclaimed actors who have dedicated themselves to veteran's causes and supporting our troops in active service. The top-rated show will be broadcast live from the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol on PBS **Sunday, May 24 from 8:00 to 9:30 p.m. ET** (check local listings) before a concert audience of hundreds of thousands, millions more at home, as well as to our troops serving around the world on the American Forces Radio and Television Network.

Joining co-hosts **Sinise** and **Mantegna** is an all-star line-up of dignitaries, actors and musical artists including: distinguished American leader **Colin L. Powell USA (Ret.)**; renowned film, television and stage actress **Katie Holmes**; Emmy Award-winning actor **Laurence Fishburne**; double Academy Award-winning actress **Dianne Wiest**; recording artist/actress **Katharine McPhee**; country music superstar **Trace Adkins**; Tony Award-winning Broadway star **Brian Stokes Mitchell**; celebrated Broadway star **Colm Wilkinson** (*Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of the Opera*); acclaimed opera star **Denyce Graves**; classical music superstar **Lang Lang**; and Grammy nominated violin virtuoso **Robert McDuffie** in performance with the **National Symphony Orchestra** under the direction of maestro **Erich Kunzel**, recipient of the National Medal of Arts. The U.S Joint Chiefs of Staff will also participate in the event along with The U.S. Army Herald Trumpets, The U.S. Army Chorus, The U.S. Army Ceremonial Band, The Soldiers' Chorus of the U.S. Army Field Band, The U.S. Navy Sea Chanters, the Armed Forces Color Guard and Service Color Teams provided by the Military District of Washington, D.C.

“For 20 years, a remarkable group of distinguished performers and television veterans have come together to create a moving remembrance and tribute to those who have been wounded or given their lives for our country,” said concert executive producer Jerry Colbert. “Together with our audience, we have become a community of care and support for our troops. And, every year, we

receive a growing number of e-mails and letters from those who still suffer their own personal and painful losses – from WWII, Korea, Vietnam, and now Iraq and Afghanistan – for whom this concert is truly a healing and uniting experience.”

The ***National Memorial Day Concert*** features uplifting musical performances, documentary footage and dramatic readings that honor all Americans who have served or made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. The 2009 event will focus on three main themes:

- As part of the nationwide Lincoln Bicentennial celebration, the concert pays tribute to Abraham Lincoln’s legacy of reaching out “to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan...” The segment will feature dramatic readings of some of Lincoln’s personal letters written during the Civil War, the most costly conflict in America’s history with over 620,000 lives lost.
- The concert will also honor the sacrifices, suffering and love of the thousands of family members caring for our severely wounded veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. These disabled warriors have become our living memorials, a visible reminder of those who sacrificed so much for the principles we stand for, and for their families who take care of them and will continue to sacrifice for them for the rest of their lives.
- As well, this 20th anniversary broadcast reaches out to the entire community of Americans who join us year after year on the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol and from around the country to support our troops. Since 1989, the producers of ***The National Memorial Day Concert*** have been privileged to welcome acclaimed stars from the stage, screen and music worlds -- from Tom Hanks, George Clooney, Jimmy Smits, Richard Dreyfuss, Kathy Bates and Natalie Cole to Gladys Knight, B.B. King, Martina McBride, Vanessa Williams, Brad Paisley and Alison Krauss. This year’s event will look back and reflect on some of the most powerful moments from the past two decades, in which these performers contributed their immense talents to help us remember and pay tribute to all those who served in America’s wars.

For the 2009 event, Colbert has assembled an award-winning production team that features the top Hollywood talent behind some of television’s most prestigious entertainment awards shows. The team includes: Emmy award-winning producer Walter C. Miller, America’s leading director and producer of live programs including the *Grammy Awards* and *Country Music Awards*; award-winning director Paul Miller whose credits include *The Country Music Awards* and *Saturday Night Live*; and veteran television writer Joan Meyerson who was honored with a distinguished Writer’s Guild Award for the 2006 ***National Memorial Day Concert***. The program is a co-production of Jerry Colbert of Capital Concerts and WETA, Washington, D.C.

A companion Web Site at www.pbs.org/memorialdayconcert will feature a comprehensive viewer’s guide to the 2009 concert and a special remembrance area where veterans and their families can send eulogies for their loved ones and friends to be delivered to the national memorials in Washington, D.C.

For over 25 years, Capital Concerts has produced the two major patriotic events at the U.S. Capitol. In 1981, executive producer Jerry Colbert presented the first PBS Fourth of July concert with the National Symphony Orchestra and guest artists performing live from the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol. In 1990, he introduced the National Memorial Day Concert. Since then, both holiday specials have been honored with over 80 awards including the New York Film Festival Award, the Telly Award, the Golden Cine Award, the Videographer Award, the National Education Association Award, the Aurora Award, the Christopher Award, the Communicator’s Award, the AXIEM Award, the Omni Award and the Writer’s Guild of America Award.

The National Memorial Day Concert is made possible by grants from Disabled American Veterans and Golden Corral Restaurants, the National Park Service, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Department of the Army, the National Endowment for the Arts, PBS and public television stations nationwide. Air travel is provided by American Airlines.

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President's Budget Heeds The American Legion's Funding Recommendations

WASHINGTON (May 11, 2009) – The leader of the nation's largest veterans organization said he is "very pleased" with the president's detailed budget request for \$113 billion in FY 2010.

"The budget's dramatically increased funding level for the Department of Veterans Affairs will allow the Secretary to take on many challenges he's facing currently," said National Commander David K. Rehbein. "The budget provisions expanding health care eligibility for veterans will allow more of them timely access to the world's best health care delivery system," he continued. "The American Legion believes no veteran should ever be denied access to quality health care."

Other challenges facing the veteran care community include combating homelessness, meeting the unique needs of women veterans, expanding care to veterans in rural areas, and enhancing outreach to and services for veterans suffering mental health issues. Addressing these, Cmdr. Rehbein said, "There needs to be a concentrated effort to make sure this nation does not fail any veteran. The successful transition from active-duty military service to the civilian workforce is major concern for The American Legion, especially for a nation at war."

"Many of these young men and women have seen the horrors of war first-hand. For some the physical scars are permanent and we, as a nation, must help make these warriors as whole as possible," Rehbein said. "However, it is often the need to help heal the invisible wounds like post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury that present the greatest challenge."

"The President and VA Secretary Eric Shinseki have put together a fine, practical budget that will allow the Department of Veterans Affairs to continue serving America's veterans and their families as they deserve," Rehbein observed. "Promises made to those placed in harm's way must be promises kept."

Last September, National Commander Rehbein addressed the funding needs of the Department of Veterans Affairs in FY 2010 before a joint session of the Veterans' Affairs Committees. Among other areas addressed in that hearing included the timely enactment of the new Post 9-11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act, improvements in the claims adjudication process for disability claims, and advance appropriations for VA medical care.

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