

The following is the entirety of National Commander Daniel M. Dellinger's speech given before delegates at the 95th National Convention in Houston, where he was elected leader of the nation's largest veterans organization.

I would like to congratulate President Nancy Brown Park and Sons of The American Legion Commander Joe Gladden on their recent elections, and I will do everything possible this year to ensure that we are a true Legion Family. Of course, the American Legion Riders will continue to play a vital role in our family.

We, The American Legion, the nation's largest veteran's organization, have rich traditions and a storied 95-year history. But, is that enough as we move towards our 100th anniversary and beyond? Just as our country has evolved since 1776, we must evolve if we want to stay relevant. Two years ago, at the beginning of my campaign, I adopted my slogan for this year of, "Building for Tomorrow Today." With my background in construction, I know you need a good set of plans and a solid foundation if you are going to build a structure to last. We have a rock solid foundation in The American Legion, our 95 years of service, so now we need a plan to get us to the next level and beyond.

Through the actions of the National Executive Committee and this convention body, we have passed resolutions that set in motion the changes we need to stay relevant to our service men and women, our veterans, our communities and our nation. There is a change in the air ... a new culture of growth in membership. One that is desperately needed if we are to continue to grow our programs and membership, taking care of those under the charge of our four pillars upon which our great organization was founded. Some voices in the media say that we are a dying organization. I disagree, and seeing all these faces in this room today, I know I'm not the only one. Having said that, in order to grow, we need everyone on this construction team to lend a hand and build our membership back to our all-time high.

We have requested that every department formulate a five-year and beyond membership plan which will be used in monitoring our growth as we move towards our 100th anniversary date and beyond. In order to reward those who sign up new or expired members this year, I have designed a hat pin that is available to anyone who signs up five new or expired members. In addition, I have also designed a distinctive challenge coin that will be given to Legion members who sign up 15 new or expired members. By the way, this also applies to any Auxiliary or Sons of The American Legion member.

In 2001 and 2002, I served as National Membership and Post Activities Chairman and both years we obtained positive membership growth. It wasn't me, it was you, the blue cappers, it was because everyone bought into the plan and worked together, we utilized "JUST ASK" and "BACK TO THE BASICS" to sign up members. This year, we can and will work hard to grow our great organization again towards another all-time high.

We are a grassroots organization and we will continue to take our message to Capitol Hill to advocate for our service men and women, veterans and issues relating to the National Security of the United States. The National Commander's testimony before the Joint Veterans' Affairs subcommittee is scheduled for September 10th, 2013. I will report on the hours donated, the monies raised and expended on our veterans and our programs, but unfortunately the numbers won't depict the true picture of what we do as an organization. Only 57 percent of all posts this past year submitted their Consolidated Post Reports. I have already had a discussion with most of the department commanders requesting their assistance in obtaining 100 percent reporting this year. Remember post commanders, the job isn't done until the reports are filed. I will continue to reinforce this message as I travel to departments this year.

I would like to thank Commander Koutz for his advocacy and leadership as we raised over \$1 million for Operation Comfort Warriors this year. We will continue to raise money to assist our wounded servicemembers returning from battle, bearing the scars of war. Recently, we also have seen many dramatic natural disasters challenging our veterans and families here at home. We have expended almost three-quarters of a million dollars in aid through the National Emergency Fund this year alone. We need to raise funds to guarantee that if a deserving and qualified veteran needs our help; we have sufficient funds available for that assistance. My commander's project will be to raise \$1 million for the NEF, which equates to about 50 cents per member. Given the recent tornadoes in Oklahoma, Hurricane Sandy and other hurricanes, and the deadly wildfires in the western states, the question is not if a natural disaster will hit, but when and where. So I encourage you to hold fundraisers to benefit this most worthy cause.

The National Executive Committee at its Spring Meetings passed resolution No. 2 based upon the recommendations of the Centennial Taskforce and approved by this convention to restructure our National Bylaws, which allows for this organization to evolve and continue being relevant. Think back when the Economic Commission was elevated from a committee, and the great work that has come out of that action, especially the fight for credentialing and licensing, the promotion of job fairs and our advocacy to alleviate

homelessness of our veterans. Their new name will be Veterans Employment and Education Commission. The restructuring as outlined in Resolution No. 2, I am sure, will have the same wide reaching effects on how we take care of business in caring for our veterans, communities and nation.

You have heard the administration assert that the backlog on claims was and is continuing to be reduced. We are and will continue to monitor this issue; it is not about how many as much as it is how accurate these claims are. We will continue to educate our service officers to ensure we maintain our degree of accuracy in processing fully developed claims. We will continue to visit VA hospitals to ensure all veterans receive the best care possible under the "System Worth Saving."

One of the changes this year is the merging of our PR and the Legion Magazine Commissions into the Media and Communications Commission. It is critical to use all methods of communication and social media as we get our message out to the American public. If you have heard me speak you've probably heard me say, "We are the second best keep secret other than the Masons." We must strive to reach all veterans and inform them of their rights and what our great organization has to offer them and their families.

I am very excited about the opportunities before us as we start building for tomorrow today. I look forward to working with each and every one of you along with the rest of the American Legion Family as we promote and grow our great organization. Again thank you for your vote of confidence as we move into our 96th year.

May God Bless you all as you return to your homes. God Bless our troops everywhere and may God continue to bless these great United States of America.