

January
**MONTANA
LEGIONNAIRE**

AMERICAN
LEGION



**Department Commander
Ken Simon**

HAPPY NEW YEAR to all! I Hope this finds everyone in good health and that you all had a Really Wonderful Christmas and New Years!

First to bring you up do date on my sparse travels since Department Fall Conference. Our trip to Fall Conference was uneventful until our van developed a mechanical issue after our arrival, so my wife and I had to settle for a rental, which we drove home. We did not get our van back until the day after Election Day!

Our National Commander James A. Jr. and his Aide Butch Hanson visited our Department for Fall Conference in Helena and gave the address to the National Honor Society Students at the East Helena High school. They also sat in on the Department Legion College led by District 10 Commander and Dean of Legion College, Irene Dickerson. Legion College class was a success with twenty-one (21) students in attendance the first day and twenty-four (24) students in attendance on day two.

The instructors were: Ken Nadeau from National taught The American Legion Riders portion, Ken George from National taught the Internal Affairs portion, and Department Adjutant Duane Cunningham taught Bridging the Gap class. On completion of the class, certificates and Montana Legion College pins were presented by National Commander James LaCoursiere, Department Commander Ken Simon, and Department Adjutant Duane Cunningham.

November 15th, I attended the Annual Turkey Party at Post 58 with my wife Corinne. This is an annual event by the Post to raise funds which is done by means of buying turkeys, hams, bacon, pork chops, and prime rib and raffling it off. The Post Legion Auxiliary held a 50-50 raffle and a meal with a free will offering was prepared and served by the Auxiliary. District 1 Commander Paul McKay was in attendance and assisted with the raffle.

Post 41 Adjutant Joe Yeoman invited my wife and I to attend their Annual Christmas dinner at the VFW in Glasgow. The dinner was cooked and served by the ladies of the Legion Auxiliary and enjoyed by the Legion Members and their wives. It was a good meal with great conversation and good people, some new faces and some whom I had not seen since High school.

Due to my being sick right after Fall Conference until early December with a cold I couldn't shake or get rid of, I did not get to travel as much as I would have liked to. So, weather and roads permitting I will try getting on the road and make some visits to Posts.

Now that we are by the holidays, I would like us to turn our attention to membership, American Legion Boys, AL Auxiliary Girls State, Oratory, Post Meetings, and Buddy Checks with members or our Posts. Some of us have members who have not renewed and a Post or two still owe the Department Membership money. Working the programs or our four pillars is important for growth in our Montana

American Legion and I believe as a Team, we can attain our goals in our Posts which will help the Districts



and the Department across the board. Let us work together to make Montana the "Best in the West!" and not the "bottom of the list in the West or the Nation." We need to also be looking down the road to our elections coming up, remembering your Post Consolidated Post Reports (CPRs) and Officer Forms. Those need to be completed and turned into Department by Spring Convention. Remember what you do in your Posts reflects all the way to National on all of us and membership is everyone's job! Congratulations to all of those Posts who made 100% and those that are still getting members to renew and also bringing in new members.

Thank you all for the Great Job you have done so far and yet we still have some work to do. Without the Blue Caps, this Department would not be able to attain the goals and milestones that we do and I have faith that you will rise to the occasion and accomplish the work we still have to do. "Team Montana – Making a Difference!"

Department Adjutant

Duane Cunningham

Greetings fellow Legionnaires, a new year is upon us, which means resolutions are made, changes instituted, and the hope of a fresh start brings positive thoughts. For the American Legion, a new year brings us the opportunity for growth and possibilities. The American Legion and its four pillars are the foundation of our organization, but it's surprising how often we forget the meaning of what they stand for. Pillar III of the American Legion is "Americanism", this pillar is probably the pillar with the most variety of things it encompasses. From US Flag protection to Immigration, to most of our foundational programs, this pillar covers a lot of ground.

Within Americanism is Citizenship, sounds simple enough right? But do we really understand what that means? It may even be a little difficult to explain, because to each individual, it could mean something a little different, or the importance of certain aspects could be different. At its heart, it is the simple idea of "community, state and nation". Doing the right thing, at the right time for the right reason as one of my mentors would always say. Why do I bring this up? And it is an opinion, but it feels like we have strayed away from our core responsibility.

Why do I say this, regardless of your politics, the last two presidential elections appear to have widened the differences of our own people to

the point where we refuse to even acknowledge the possibility of a different opinion, compromise is no longer an often-used term or solution. People simply don't volunteer like they used to; they don't get involved in the community, or in organizations, it's easier just to complain. We as an organization need to refocus on what being a good citizen means. Citizenship means that:

- As good citizens we do our share to help our families and our communities to be better.
- We are good neighbors.
- We obey rules and laws, we cooperate with others, we find common ground.
- They respect those in authority.
- We stay informed about important issues, and we vote.
- We are responsible for our behavior.
- We demonstrate good sportsmanship, and we respect others' opinions
- We volunteer to help; we step forward and we take care of each other.

Being a good citizen comes with rights, duties and privileges. But it also comes with the responsibility to exercise it in a fair manner and to work toward helping fellow citizens do the same. Citizens are active. Citizenship demands participation, involvement, and contribution. No one makes a difference without being involved. People have no choice about the family or

country they are born into, but people do have a choice about whether to

be responsible members of their families and communities.

There are a few quotes I will share, "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country." - John Fitzgerald Kennedy "The most important political office is that of a private citizen." - Louis Brandeis

"When you have decided what you believe, what you feel must be done, have the courage to stand alone and be counted." - Eleanor Roosevelt

I ask each of you to reinforce the American Legion in your communities, get involved, volunteer, find one new member to bring into our family. Think about this, if all 10,000 plus of our Legion Family found one new member to join our organization, we would double in size every year. Is it really impossible to find one new member in a 12-month period? I believe each of us can find just one. Till next time, go forth and do great things.





How do I contact my State Senator and Representative?

See below links to communicate with your Legislators

- [Participate Montana Legislature Site](#) - [Participate - Montana Legislature](#)
- You will need to establish an account in "Participate" to email your legislator
- [Who Is My Legislator?](#) - [Districts - Montana Legislature](#)
- Click magnifying glass in upper right corner of map, then enter address
- Or, leave a message: **406.444.4800**

Roger A. Hagan (Legislative Committee Chairman, MT Department of the American Legion)
117 Gerber Road, Great Falls, MT 59405, Cell (406) 459-0773

Join Us in Tampa Bay for the 106th National Convention

The American Legion’s 106th National Convention will take place from August 22–28, 2025, in sunny Tampa, Florida. This annual event is an incredible opportunity for members to engage in the business of The American Legion, connect with fellow Legionnaires from across the country, and celebrate our shared mission of service to veterans, their families, and our communities.

Montana delegates will stay at the Hyatt Place Downtown Tampa, located at 325 N. Florida Ave., just 13 blocks from the Tampa Convention Center. Shuttle services will be available between the hotel and the convention venue for your convenience. Delegates are required to stay at the designated convention hotel. Room rates start at \$131 per night for double occupancy, with additional charges for triple and quad occupancies.

Please note that valet parking is \$29 per day, with no self-parking options available.

Members interested in attending must request registration forms from Department Headquarters by emailing amlegmtsec@gmail.com. Completed forms must be submitted at the Department Convention in Helena, scheduled for June 20–22, 2025. All convention registrations are due prior to the Department Convention, with deposits required by July 1.

If you plan to attend the prestigious National Commander’s Banquet, make sure to submit your \$70 payment by March 20, 2025. This non-refundable payment ensures your seat at one of the convention’s highlight events. Banquet tickets are only non-refundable, so we encourage early reservations to secure your attendance. Details about the entertainment for the banquet will be announced soon. The National Convention promises to be an exciting and memorable experience for all attendees. Don’t miss this opportunity to represent Montana and contribute to the important work of The American Legion.

For more information, contact Department Headquarters or visit the American Legion’s National Convention website.

Important Update: VA Online Sign-In Changes

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is implementing changes to its online sign-in process to enhance security and make it easier for veterans to access their benefits and resources. These updates are designed to protect your personal information and provide a more seamless experience when interacting with VA systems.

To assist veterans with these changes, the VA has created a series of step-by-step instructional videos. These videos cover everything you need to know, from preparing for the transition to verifying your identity on the new platforms.

Here’s what you’ll find in the video series:

- 1 Preparing for VA Sign-In Changes
- 2 Choosing Your New Sign-In Account
- 3 Creating Your Login.gov Account
- 4 Verifying Your Identity for Login.gov
- 5 Creating Your ID.me Account
- 6 Verifying Your Identity for ID.me

You can watch the videos and learn more about the changes on the VA website at www.va.gov/resources/videos-for-how-to-set-up-your-online-va-sign-in-account/.

These updates are a crucial step toward safeguarding your information while ensuring you can easily access the benefits and services you’ve earned. The American Legion encourages all veterans to review the videos and complete the necessary steps to avoid any disruption in accessing your VA accounts.

Please share this information with fellow veterans to help spread awareness and ensure a smooth transition for everyone.

Your benefits, made more secure.



Brooklyn 14.0 Pro Tandem Pedal Kayak (PK14) Gray Camo
Valued at \$3695.00

2-BKC KP224 86" Kayak Paddles 2 Piece Heavy Duty Light Weight Paddle with Anti-Slip Grips \$100.00



2 -Upright Aluminum Kayak Seats \$299.98

2-BKC UH-PKDRIVE Kayak Pedal Drive Supports PK11, PK12, PK13 OR PK14 \$1195.00

Room for Two: The spacious 14-foot hull provides plenty of space for a pair of paddlers and has a stunning 670-pound total weight capacity

Easy Cruising: Can support a built-in trolling motor making cruising effortless, while a hand-operated super wide rudder makes control precise and responsive with a better turning radius

Cargo Capacity: Not only can Brooklyn 14.0 Pro pedal Tandem Kayak take the weight, but it can store your stuff in a pair of sealed hatches or in a rear cargo recess - as well as a new storage area near the seats for any quick grabs, like lures, bait, etc.

Superior Stability: The 14-foot long, 34-inch wide hull creates a platform so stable you can stand for casting and that won't tip even in rough water

Easy Transport: Along with the side grips, the Pro yaks have new molded carry handles in front and rear of the kayak

Vice Commander, Kim Kay

As members of the American Legion, we are united by a shared commitment to serve veterans, support national security, mentor our youth, and promote patriotism. These core objectives, known as the Four Pillars, form the foundation of our organization and guide our mission.

As with any organization, membership is the lifeblood that sustains our efforts. You can't have a military without soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen. You can't sustain a sports team without a fan base. All organizations need its following, its volunteers and its members. It's a common misconception that the responsibility of recruiting and retaining members within our organization that membership falls solely on the officers of our posts, districts, or department. When in reality, every Legionnaire is responsible and plays a crucial role in this endeavor. Our collective strength enables us to advocate effectively for veteran health, influence national security policies, and implement programs that benefit our youth. Without all of us promoting and educating about our organization, we are not going to succeed.

Past National Commander Bill Oxford emphasized this collective responsibility, stating that membership isn't just one person's job—it's a shared duty for all of us. This sentiment underscores the importance of each member's active participation in recruitment and engagement efforts. By sharing personal experiences and the impact the American Legion has had on our lives, we can inspire others to join our cause. Engaging with our communities, participating in local events, and promoting the values we stand for are effective ways to attract new members. Moreover, fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment within our posts encourages current members to remain active and involved.

The Four Pillars—Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children & Youth—serve as a roadmap for our initiatives. Each pillar represents a commitment to a specific area of service:

- Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation: Ensuring veterans receive the care and benefits they deserve.
- National Security: Supporting a strong national defense and advocating for policies that protect our nation.
- Americanism: Promoting patriotism, responsible citizenship, and respect for the flag.
- Children & Youth: Providing programs and support to help young people develop into responsible citizens.

By actively contributing to these pillars, we not only uphold the mission of the American Legion but also demonstrate the value of membership to potential recruits. Our programs, such as youth mentorship and community service projects, showcase our dedication to making a positive impact.

We have all heard by now, the mantra "Be the One" to end Veteran suicide. I challenge each and every Montana Legionnaire to "Find Just One." Recruit one new member, that's it, one new member a year, that isn't a very tough task if you think about it, but it would make an incredible difference in strengthening our organization.

In conclusion, the responsibility of membership extends beyond our officers; it is a shared duty that each of us must embrace. Through collective effort, we can strengthen our organization, expand our reach, and continue to make meaningful contributions to our veterans, communities, and nation.

Chaplain's Corner

Honoring the Legacy of the Four Chaplains
Each year, on February 3rd, we pause to honor the Four Chaplains, a story of heroism, unity, and selflessness that resonates deeply within the American Legion's core values of service to God and country. This year marks another solemn remembrance of these four extraordinary men who embodied the highest ideals of faith, sacrifice, and love for their fellow man. On February 3, 1943, the USAT Dorchester, a transport ship carrying over 900 troops, was struck by a German torpedo in the icy waters of the North Atlantic. Chaos ensued as the ship began to sink. Among the soldiers were four chaplains from different faith traditions: Lt. George L. Fox (Methodist minister), Lt. Alexander D. Goode (Jewish rabbi), Lt. John P. Washington (Roman Catholic priest), and Lt. Clark V. Poling (Reformed Church in America minister). Despite their diverse religious backgrounds, they united in a common purpose: to serve and save others. As the ship's fate became clear, the chaplains remained calm, guiding soldiers to lifeboats and offering prayers and words of comfort. When life jackets ran out, these men removed their own and gave them to others, knowing it meant they would not survive. Witnesses recounted seeing the chaplains standing together on the deck, arms linked, praying as the Dorchester sank beneath the waves. The courage and sacrifice of these chaplains remind us of the enduring strength found in unity and faith. They transcended religious and cultural boundaries to embody the principles of brotherhood and selflessness—principles that align closely with the mission of the American Legion. The Four Chaplains' story is not just one of extraordinary heroism but also a call to action for all of us. Their example challenges us to embrace and celebrate diversity, fostering unity within our ranks and our communities. The American Legion, as a pillar of support for veterans and their families, is committed to upholding these values. The Four Chaplains Ceremony, observed annually, serves as a poignant reminder of our duty to serve others selflessly, just as these chaplains did. As Legionnaires, we have a responsibility to ensure their legacy endures. Hosting or attending a Four Chaplains Ceremony in your community is a meaningful way to honor their sacrifice and promote the ideals of unity and faith. By sharing their story, we inspire future generations to act with courage, compassion, and a commitment to serving others. This February 3rd, let us come together in remembrance of these four heroes. Let us reaffirm our dedication to the values they upheld and carry forward their spirit of service. In honoring the Four Chaplains, we honor the best of humanity and the enduring strength of unity in diversity.

WORKING FOR ALL LEGIONNAIRES

Hello, fellow Legionnaires! My name is Irene Dickerson, and I am running for Vice Commander of the American Legion Department of Montana. I'm a retired Army officer with 30 years of active duty and Reserve service, including deployments to Iraq, Kuwait, and Afghanistan, retiring in 2013. I've been a Legion member since 2014, serving as Adjutant for Post 524 in Texas and currently as District 10 Commander in Southeast Montana. I also serve as the Dean of Montana American Legion College and the Department's Woman Veterans Coordinator.

I am committed to growing the American Legion College, increasing female veteran involvement, and expanding Montana's membership through training, outreach, and community engagement. My leadership philosophy is rooted in teamwork, open-mindedness, and problem-solving, with a focus on ensuring The American Legion remains impactful and relevant.

I look forward to working with you to strengthen our mission.



Lowell Long is a candidate for the position of Alternate National Executive Committeeman for Montana. Lowell is a 22 year member of the American Legion. He has served in many positions in the American Legion including Post 48 Commander and Adjutant, District 2 Commander and Adjutant, North Central Zone Commander, Department Vice Commander, and Department Commander for 2022-2024. He has served on many Department and National Committees including Montana American Legion Boys State Committee, Oratorical Scholarship Committee, the Centennial Committee for Montana and the Conventional Armed Forces Committee at National. He has also served as Squadron 48 Adjutant, North Central Zone Commander, Detachment Commander, and Alternate NEC for the Sons of the American Legion.

Please Vote for Lowell Long for Alternate NEC at the Department Convention this June in Helena.

Greetings fellow Legionnaires! Many of you know me, but for those that do not my name is Andrew Rice and I am currently serving as the North Central Zone Commander. During the fall conference I officially announced my campaign to run for Department Vice Commander. First, I will start with a little history about me. I am 39 years old and served a total of 8 years in the US Army and Army National Guard. During that span I deployed to Iraq for Operation Iraqi Freedom 5-7. Early into my military career, my father, Hal Rice, was insistent that I join the American Legion and I have now been a member of this great organization for 21 years. Over the course of my time in the American Legion I have served and am currently serving as the Post 102 commander in Geraldine. I have also been the district 8 commander before moving into the zone commander position for my respective area. Each position I have held has been greatly enjoyable and a fulfilling experience and I have also been at the forefront of our push to be more visible in the public and helping the department to implement some of the ideas that have been put forth. Other positions I currently have are the Squadron 102 commander in Geraldine and I am also serving as the Detachment Commander for the SAL.

Now a bit about my reasoning to want to run for the Department Vice Commander position. Many talks have been had about wanting to infuse some youth into the organization and I find myself in a unique position that I can relate to our existing membership in many ways but also understand the mentality of the younger veterans across the state and some of the things they are looking for. During my time manning booths at the fairs and talking to veterans in public I have been able to recruit and have meaningful talks with many of the veterans from Malmstrom Air Force Base and other communities. Much of this falls into my vision for the American Legion and it falls into just three words: Unity, Family and Mission. Unity in that we work together to reach our goals. Family that we work together across the board. The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, Sons of the American Legion, and the Legion Riders are the family and as a family we are so much stronger together. As we know, family does not always agree with each other but we can always work out our differences to focus on the third word; mission. The mission is always to be there for our veterans. Whether they are a member or not, we are there for our veterans. For me this is an amazing organization to belong to and I end this with my solemn promise to give this organization and our members and veterans my absolute full effort and attention to keep it as strong and amazing as possible.



PDC Richard A. Klose Sr. for NEC

Fellow Legionnaires,

I am honored to announce my candidacy for National Executive Committeeman (NEC) to represent Montana at the National NEC meetings.

As a proud resident of Laurel in south-central Montana, I am centrally located and well-positioned to travel throughout the state, assisting the Department wherever and whenever needed.

With my experience as a member of the National Membership and Post Activities (M&PA) Committee, I have gained valuable insight into the workings and responsibilities at the National level. This experience has prepared me to effectively advocate for Montana's interests and contribute to the success of our Legion programs.

I humbly ask for your support and your vote at our 2025 Department Convention. Together, we can strengthen our mission and ensure Montana's voice is heard.

For God and Country,
Richard A. Klose Sr.
Past Department
Commander

RICHARD A KLOSE SR.

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE



Vote For Me

Department Commander

KIM KAY C MCCARTY MARTIN



VOTE

Linda Cousineau

For Department Vice Commander

"Life is forever changing"

I'm 110% ready for our next change

Currently Western Zone Commander
and Broadwater Post 42 Commander

15 year member



Jeff Nelson

I am running for the position of Alternate NEC and would like your support. The Sharbono-Nelson ticket would provide the Dept of Montana a leading voice in the leadership needed in Indianapolis. The position is one that requires more than another feather in the hat, but one that will let National know what our concerns are and be able to work with the other Departments across the country.

My background includes 2 years as Montana Dept. Commander, serving through the covid years, Named Commander of the year by National as the

highest ranking Commander for surpassing goal in membership 2019, Being Montana SAL Commander the following year, Having attended 14 National conventions and meeting many delegates from all areas of the United States and served on numerous committees with them.

I feel it is a time for trust and transparency from our leaders and am asking your support in seeking this position.



“Inspire, Train, Learn”

VOTE

Glen Sharbono

**National Executive Committee
2025-2027**

- Post Adjutant 2014-2025
- Post Vice Commander 2015-2017
- Post Commander 2018-2021/2022-2025
- American Legion Family Ribbon
- Post Excellence Award
- Post and District Oratory Chairman
- District Vice Commander/Adjutant
- Merv Gunderson Award
- District Commander
- 2017 Graduate American Legion Basic Training
- 2017 Graduate of Montana Legion College
- 2017 Graduate of The National American Legion College
- Dean of The Montana Legion College
- Department Vice Commander
- Department Commander



Glen Sharbono



Alternate NEC Member currently serving since 2023 and trained to be your next National Executive Committee Member!



THE AUXILIARY SERVICE STAR



Leona Somerfeld, Membership Chairman

Happy New Year from my house to yours. Membership has been coming in slowly, please try to send in what you have and make some calls as reminders. Thank you for all you do.

Our 2000 Ford Mustang Convertible raffle is well under way. Get your tickets sold and send me the check, if you need more books let me know. The tickets are \$20 each, every District President was given books of tickets. Remember the Raffle winner will be drawn at our Department Convention in June.

Activities from American Legion Auxiliary Unit #32, Terry MT

Annually, on Veterans Day, the students at Terry Public School host a ceremony for Veterans at the Veterans Park located on Logan Avenue in Terry. The students were involved with presentations. The younger grades paraded with their banners, posters and sang. The middle school students each presented a line from historical facts commemorating the day as assigned by their teachers. A few high school students presented 3–5-minute speeches integrating 7 key words assigned to them by the history teacher with a basis on past military involvements. The music department played patriotic music in between presentations. The afternoon concluded with the Post's Honor Guard presenting a rifle volley salute followed by taps. The ALA handed all the kids involved a juice drink and a snack and even to some of the young kids in the audience.

ALA Unit #32 hosted a Craft Fair on a nasty day in mid-November. There were 13 booths that filled the Post Hall meeting space. The event was coordinated by the club manager, who also happens to be a Unit member, and a few of our other

DEPT. OF MT AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY
2000 FORD MUSTANG CONVERTIBLE RAFFLE

2WD, V6, 160K miles, New Tires
Donated by Billiette & Tim Coolidge from Sunburst, MT

\$20 per ticket
Drawing on June 28, 2025 at Department Convention
Contact an Auxiliary member or Leona @406-788-1967
Need not be present to win

DEPT OF MT AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY
2000 FORD MUSTANG V6 CONVERTIBLE RAFFLE

NAME: _____
ADDRESS: _____
PHONE: _____

Vehicle was donated by
Billiette & Tim Coolidge
of Sunburst, MT

NEED NOT BE PRESENT TO WIN
DONATION—\$20 PER TICKET DRAWING WILL BE HELD JUNE 28, 2025

NEED NOT BE PRESENT TO WIN
DONATION—\$20 PER TICKET DRAWING WILL BE HELD JUNE 28, 2025

members. For a small fee coffee, sweet rolls and the booth space is a fund raiser for the Unit. During the annual Army – Navy Football watch party Post #32 and the ALA Unit provide goodies for all who would like to stop in at the Club for a quick snack or stay to cheer on at the game. Again, this year a Post member made caribou chili, another made cheese dips and a Unit member made beef chili. Unit members also provided many varieties of sweet and salty treats. Following the football game is the Post's annual Christmas Party and dance. The Club provides a band, finger foods and the Unit provides dessert treats. It is an annual fun community event for the start of the Christmas season.

Exciting Updates for Montana American Legion Boys and Auxiliary Girls State 2025

The Montana American Legion Boys State and Auxiliary Girls State programs are gearing up for another impactful year in 2025. This prestigious initiative, designed to develop leadership skills and civic responsibility among Montana’s youth, will take place from June 8-14, 2025, at Carroll College in Helena.

A Legacy of Leadership

For decades, the Boys State and Girls State programs have provided high school students with a unique, hands-on opportunity to learn about government operations and leadership. Participants engage in activities such as running mock governments, drafting legislation, and experiencing the inner workings of the democratic process. This immersive program not only educates students about civic responsibilities but also inspires many to pursue careers in public service and community leadership. The lifelong skills and confidence gained from this experience have proven to be invaluable for generations of Montana’s youth.

Inaugural Fundraiser Banquet – February 4th

In an exciting first, the Montana American Legion Boys and Auxiliary Girls State programs will host an inaugural Alumni Fundraiser Banquet on Sunday, February 4th, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. at the Delta Colonial Hotel in Helena. This special event aims to celebrate the achievements of these programs and raise essential funds to support the upcoming 2025 sessions.

Highlights of the Banquet:

- **Distinguished Sponsorship Opportunities:** Organizations and individuals are invited to sponsor a table at the event for \$650. Each table includes dinner for eight guests, comprising four local senators or rep-

resentatives and four guests of the sponsor’s choice. This provides a rare opportunity to engage directly with key figures in Montana’s legislative community while supporting a noble cause.

- **Silent Auction:** Guests will have the chance to participate in a silent auction, with all proceeds benefiting the Boys and Girls State programs.

- **Tax-Deductible Contribution:** Sponsorships are tax-deductible and directly contribute to the continuation of these impactful youth programs.

This banquet is not only a fundraiser but also a celebration of the bright future fostered by the Boys and Girls State programs. Attendees will have the opportunity to connect with alumni, community leaders, and current program participants to witness firsthand the transformative impact of their support.

Join the Movement

The funds raised through this banquet will play a vital role in ensuring that the 2025 Boys and Girls State programs continue to offer high-quality experiences for Montana’s youth. By sponsoring a table or contributing to the silent auction, you become a part of a legacy that shapes the leaders of tomorrow.

Mark your calendars for this momentous occasion on February 4th, and be part of an event that celebrates the values of leadership, community, and civic responsibility. Let’s come together to ensure the continued success of these outstanding programs that make such a difference in our state.

For more information or to become a sponsor, please contact the Montana American Legion deptmtadju-tant@gmail.com. Your support makes all the difference!



Park City Legion Basketball Game Color Guard



Park City Legion Highway Cleanup with Students



AMERICAN LEGION RIDERS



Montana American Legion Riders: Collaboration and Growth

The Montana American Legion Riders (ALR) are hitting the road to success thanks to the momentum generated by our monthly directors' meetings. These gatherings have become a vital platform for idea sharing, collaborative planning, and strategizing for the future. From exchanging best practices to discussing ways to amplify our impact, these meetings have strengthened bonds across chapters and set the stage for dynamic combined chapter events. We applaud all directors and members who contribute their time and energy to ensure these meetings are productive and inspiring.

American Legion Riders College: Coming This April

Mark your calendars! The inaugural American Legion Riders College is set to take place in April. This exciting program is open to all Riders as well as anyone interested in starting an ALR chapter. The college will provide invaluable insights into chapter management, event organization, and fostering community partnerships. This is a fantastic opportunity to enhance your leadership skills, build connections, and contribute to the growth of the ALR in Montana. Stay tuned for further details and registration information!

Plan Ahead for the 2025 Department Ride
Looking for your next adventure? The Department Ride is scheduled for August 28 to September 1, 2025. This event promises

breathtaking routes, camaraderie, and an opportunity to showcase the unity and spirit of Montana's ALR. Any chapter interested in participating



or seeking additional details is encouraged to contact the Director of Billings Chapter 119. Together, we can make this ride an unforgettable experience for all.

Thank you to all members for your dedication to the mission of the American Legion Riders. Your passion, commitment, and collaborative efforts continue to make a difference in our communities and beyond. Let's keep the momentum rolling!





SONS OF THE AMERICAN LEGION



Detachments, squadrons and individual members are encouraged to submit award nominations.

Some important deadlines are coming up for Sons of The American Legion awards. Here are details; forms for these awards and more are available on the legion.org.

Squadron Commander of the Year Award

Nominations for this award must be submitted by the detachment adjutant and received at National Headquarters by the opening of May's Spring NEC meeting. Nominees must be a member in good standing in the SAL; hold only the office of squadron commander at the time of nomination; demonstrate leadership through action and involvement in squadron activities that benefit his community; and must obtain 100% squadron membership or better by March 15.

Marvin P. Nay Veterans Employment and Education Outstanding Contributor Award

Nominations for this award must be received prior to the May Spring NEC meeting of the Veterans Employment and Education Commission meeting. The award will be voted on at that meeting and presented at the National Convention in August.

Nominees must be a member in good standing in the Sons of The American Legion engaged in the fundraising, distribution of funds or goods, and/or volunteering at an event deemed beneficial to veterans' employment and/or education, to include homelessness. A detachment may submit more than one nominees, and an SAL member may nominate himself.

All-Time High Honor Ribbon Request

Pursuant to Resolution F3-85, the All-

Time High Detachment Honor Ribbon (Red) will be awarded at National Convention to a Sons of The American Legion detachment which has exceeded all previous years' membership. The form should be reported to National Headquarters when an all-time high for membership occurs for the applicable membership year.

Charles B. Rigby Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Volunteer of the Year Award

Squadrons should submit their nominee to the detachment adjutant during the detachment convention once the nominee form has been attested by the squadron or post commander. The appropriate detachment officials should select one nominee for award consideration and the detachment adjutant should forward the nomination form to National Headquarters no later than 30 days prior to the National Convention to be considered.

George B. Evans Grassroots Veterans Advocate of the Year Award

This award recognizes an SAL member in good standing who has performed outstanding service and made significant contributions in time and effort to grassroots veterans' advocacy work. An award may be presented each year to a member who takes on a bold leadership role by building relationships with elected officials who directly impact public policy; by actively taking the message of the national Sons of The American Legion to key media outlets; and by developing strong grassroots initiatives.

Nominations may be submitted by an individual, squadron, district or detachment and are due by July 20.

Snapshots of Service Award

Submitted photos must be based on the Four Pillars of The American Legion — Americanism; Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation; Children & Youth; or National



Security — and be in a digital JPG or TIF format. Submissions also will become the property of the SAL; must not have a right of restriction; must contain Sons with their covers or identifiable clothing on during the activity or event and a brief history of the event. Entries must be submitted from a squadron, with a maximum of three photos per category, and submissions must be from the current time period (Aug. 1, 2024 to 30 days prior to the National Convention).

Blue Brigade Award

Any SAL member who signs up 30 or more new members into the Sons of The American Legion by July 22 is eligible for this award.

Membership Recruiter Award

Any SAL members who recruits five new members into the Sons of The American Legion during the current membership year is eligible for this award. Award forms must be submitted by June 30.

The Honor and Importance of Connecting with Veterans

When you take the time to connect with a veteran, you're doing more than just lending a helping hand; you're preserving a legacy of courage, commitment, and sacrifice. Each veteran carries a unique story that reflects their service, their struggles, and their triumphs. For those of us fortunate enough to work alongside veterans, every interaction holds the potential to make a meaningful impact—both for them and for us.

One of the most rewarding aspects of assisting veterans is witnessing the power of a simple question: "How can I help?" This question, unassuming yet full of intent, often opens the door to remarkable stories and opportunities to make a difference.

Take, for example, the story of a local veteran. She had served in the Navy decades ago but had never sought assistance for the benefits she was entitled to. A trained American Legion Department Officer recognized her hesitation and gently asked the right questions to uncover her needs. When she mentioned that she didn't have a copy of her DD-214—the document that verifies military service—the officer assured her that this was a common challenge and one they could tackle together. Without this document, she felt stuck, unsure how to

access the benefits she'd earned. Once her situation was understood, the officer, with the support of trusted staff, stepped in to assist. They submitted a request to the National Personnel Records Center to obtain a copy of the veteran's DD-214. While waiting on the document, the veteran was connected to a service officer, and they sat down with her to explain how to initiate a claim with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). They broke the process into manageable steps, ensuring she felt informed and confident. Throughout the process, the American Legion of Montana team didn't just focus on forms and procedures—they also listened to her stories of service, gaining insight into her experiences and challenges. These conversations revealed additional ways to assist her, including connecting her with local resources and support networks.

The experience was transformative not only for the veteran but also for those involved. Hearing firsthand accounts of a veteran's service is a privilege. It's a reminder of the sacrifices our men and women in uniform make, as well as the resilience they embody. For those working within the American Legion, these moments aren't just part of the mission—they're the heart of it.

As highlighted on [legion.org](https://www.legion.org), the role of a trained American Legion

service officer is deeply rooted in the organization's commitment to "Veterans Strengthening America." These officers undergo extensive training to ensure they're well-versed in veterans' benefits, including pensions, health care, education, and more. But their mission goes beyond paperwork and policies; it's about building trust, offering guidance, and providing hope. For any veteran reading this, know that you don't need to have all your documents or knowledge of the system to seek help. A knowledgeable American Legion officer will meet you where you are and walk with you every step of the way. And for those who have the opportunity to connect with veterans, remember that your role is about more than assisting with tasks; it's about honoring their service and ensuring they feel valued and supported.

Every veteran's story is a thread in the fabric of our nation's history. By reaching out, listening, and lending a hand, we not only help them navigate the present but also ensure their legacy is preserved for future generations. In the words of one seasoned American Legion officer, "It's not just about the benefits they're entitled to. It's about reminding them that their service mattered and still matters to all of us."

To connect with veterans, you can:

1. Join veteran-focused social media groups and platforms.
2. Participate in virtual events and meetups.
3. Join local and national veteran organizations.
4. Volunteer and give back to the veteran community.
5. Create your own online group or meetup.
6. Stay active and engaged. You can also connect with accredited American Legion service officers who provide assistance to veterans and their families. The American Legion offers resources for education, employment, and more



BE THE ONE

BEST PERCENTAGE BY DISTRICT

POST 85	BAINVILLE	100.97%
POST 109	TURNER	107.87%
POST 69	GALATA	105.26%
POST 426	LAKESIDE	98.11%
POST 125	DRUMMOND	98.73%
POST 42	TOWNSEND	99.22%
POST 19	BIG TIMBER	88.44%
POST 64	DUTTON	94.44%
POST 18	ROUNDUP	102.17%
POST 114	FAIRVIEW	92.86%
POST 100	PARK CITY	103.39%

American Legion Membership year 2025

Dear Friend:

We are excited to share details about one of our fundraising efforts, The Big K. As the name suggests, there are only 1,000 tickets available, and they are first come, first serve. This fundraiser benefits various community programs supported by The American Legion of Montana. For every Big K purchased, \$10.00 is returned to a local Post, Unit, or Squadron, and for every 10 sold within a District, the District is entered into a special District drawing. The remaining funds contribute to the prizes listed below and support our statewide programs.

Purchase of a Big K for \$25.00 places your name in 9 drawings that are held throughout the year, beginning in January with the \$100 New Year drawing and the first of 6 monthly drawings held January to June for \$400.00. We have an additional \$500.00 drawing for the celebration of The American Legion Birthday in March and a final drawing made and announced at Convention for \$1,800.00. New this year, we will be adding a \$200 drawing for a special District drawing—for every 10 sold in your area, your District number goes into the pot. The more sold, the more chances your District gets for a chance to win. If you are interested in participating in the 2025 Big K raffle, please return the form below, including your mailing address, along with your check for \$25.00 made payable to the American Legion of Montana, as soon as possible.

Again, thank you for your participation and support.

District Standings

District 2	86.47%	Jed Damson
District 11	83.21%	Richard Klose
District 5	82.92%	Alex Vogel
District 9	82.76%	Dean Martin
District 4	79.30%	Robert Lehman
District 6	76.80%	Dave Haulman
District 7	75.04%	Dan Smart
District 10	74.70%	Irene Dickerson
District 3	72.91%	Keith Stark
District 1	70.67%	Jerry Davenport
District 8	70.27%	Michael Allison

Big K Raffle Form

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City, State, ZIP: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Local (circle one) Post/Unit/Squadron # _____

Please send this completed form and your check for \$25.00, made payable to:

The American Legion of Montana

PO Box 155

Fort Harrison, MT 59636

Thank you for supporting The Big K raffle!

Spotlight on the American Legion Oratorical Contest: An Opportunity for Young Leaders

The American Legion Oratorical Contest is a premier scholarship competition that fosters leadership qualities, sharpens public speaking skills, and deepens understanding of the U.S. Constitution among high school students. The Department of Montana is proud to announce that this year’s Department-level contest will take place on March 29, 2025, at East Helena High School, beginning at 8:00 AM.

What is the Oratorical Contest?

The American Legion Oratorical Contest provides high school students the platform to deliver original speeches focusing on the Constitution’s enduring significance. Participants are tasked with presenting an 8-to-10-minute prepared oration on some aspect of the Constitution, emphasizing the citizen’s duties and obligations to government. Additionally, contestants must respond to an assigned topic discourse, a challenging impromptu exercise that demonstrates their mastery of constitutional principles.

The contest not only helps participants develop critical thinking and

public speaking skills but also offers substantial scholarship opportunities at every level of competition. To learn more about the contest’s purpose and structure, visit The American Legion’s Oratorical Contest page. Exciting New Scholarship Awards for 2025

This year, the Department Executive Committee of The American Legion, Department of Montana, has restructured and increased the scholarship awards to encourage broader participation and reward excellence:

- All contestants will receive \$175 upon registering for the Department contest.
- Scholarship prizes for the top performers are as follows:
 - o 1st Place: \$5,000
 - o 2nd Place: \$1,500
 - o 3rd Place: \$500
 - o 4th Place: \$500

In a significant update, scholarship awards will be paid directly to contestants at the time of the contest, allowing immediate recognition and support for their academic pursuits. These enhancements reflect The American Legion’s commitment to nurturing the next generation of civic-minded leaders.

Important Dates and Reminders

For those aspiring to compete at the Department level, it is crucial to par-

ticipate in Post and District contests:

- Post Contests must be completed by March 15, 2025.
- District Contests must be completed by March 22, 2025.

These preliminary rounds are essential steps toward reaching the Department contest and, ultimately, the National Finals. High school students interested in participating should contact their local American Legion Post or visit the Montana Legion Oratorical Contest page for more details.

A Pathway to National Recognition
Winners of the Department contest will advance to the National Finals, where additional scholarship awards await. The National Champion receives a \$25,000 scholarship, with substantial awards for second and third places as well.

The American Legion Oratorical Contest is more than a competition; it’s a journey that equips students with invaluable skills and inspires them to be informed and engaged citizens. Mark your calendar for March 29, 2025, and join us in East Helena to celebrate the talent and dedication of Montana’s young orators.

For more information, please contact Chairman Jeff Holmes at broncojeff7@hotmail.com.



MT Department - American Legion Represents You at the State Legislature

Roger Hagan

The Montana State Legislature kicked off the 69th Legislative Session on Monday, January 6th, 2025. The first week your Legion volunteer team testified on 5 bills and are tracking many more to be heard in the future.

The first bill we testified in favor of on Tuesday was Senate Bill (SB) 59, 'Staff Sergeant Arthur J. Rambo Memorial Bridge'. This bill would memorialize Staff Sergeant Rambo, a Libby, MT native, for his heroism in Vietnam in 1969. He was posthumously awarded the Silver Star. A very heart warming and compelling hearing that included many of this Soldier's family. This bill passed the Senate the next day and was heard in the House State Administration Committee the following Friday.

The team also testified on House Bill (HB) 66, 'Adopting the most recent federal military codes and regulations'. This is an every two year bill that just brings the Montana National Guard rules and regulations for state military duty to comport with the federal rules and regulations.

Then there was testimony on HB 72, 'Revise enlisted militia compensation for State Active Duty'. This would remove the 15-day limit on enlisted duty pay at two times base pay rate. If passed, the enlisted would be paid two times their base pay rate regardless of the

Service Officer: Eric Beal

Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC)

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) plans to expand its Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC), which supports family caregivers of eligible Veterans with training, financial aid, health coverage, and more. This initiative aims to reduce burdens on Veterans and caregivers, expand telehealth home visits during emergencies, and revise eligibility criteria to include more Veterans.

Key proposed changes include:

Expanded eligibility: Broader definitions of "serious injury" will include those with "individual unemployment."

Telehealth flexibility: Home visits via telehealth will be allowed during emergencies.

duration of the orders.

Next, your American Legion, testified in favor of HB 81, to 'Revise law to change supervision of veterans' affairs division administrator'. This bill authorizes The Adjutant General to hire and supervise the Administrator of the Montana Veterans' Affairs Division, rather than the Montana Board of Veterans' Affairs. The Board testified in favor of this as well.

Finally, the following Monday, January 13th, your team testified in favor of HB 53, a bill to 'Revise law allowing for troop labor to execute projects'. This would give our Montana National Guard engineers and RED HORSE units the opportunity to build small scale projects on state owned National Guard land without requiring the project to be bid on in the private sector. These projects would be low-cost construction projects that would give our Soldiers and Airmen a great opportunity to get hands-on experience in their duty specialty and better prepare the for a trade in the civilian sector. We have many more bills to track and respond to over the next 4 months. I have included a 'sample' LEGISLATIVE ALERT NOTICE with this article. When we have a particularly troubling bill to support or oppose, we will be sending this alert out and asking for your help. So please click on the links at the bottom of the alert now and prepare yourself for the emergency response we may need you to make.

Thank you for your help in making this yet another successful legislative session.

Fewer reassessments: Eligibility reviews will occur every two years instead of annually.

Delayed discharges: Reassessments for legacy participants will be postponed for 18 months beyond September 2025.

Clarified criteria: Updates will simplify eligibility and stipend qualification requirements.

The proposed rule supports President Biden's Unity Agenda and seeks public input. Learn more about PCAFC at www.caregiver.va.gov or by calling 855-260-3274.

