

The American Legion is built on service, advocacy, and support for veteran-related causes. As veterans' needs evolve, we must modernize through strategic planning, active listening, and collaboration. I appreciate Commander Brambila and our DEC for their leadership in this direction, and I am encouraged that both Department Commander candidates support ongoing strategic planning and execution. This commitment will help us improve programs, focus on priorities, simplify and encourage new membership growth, and support veterans of all backgrounds and ages. Currently, fewer than 8% of veterans nationwide and fewer than 4% in California are members of The American Legion. We must act. Let's use data, strengthen partnerships, and work together to make the Legion more welcoming, responsive, and effective for the next century.



My name is **Chris Yates**, and I respectfully request your support for my candidacy for National Executive Committee member for California.

The National Executive Committee (NEC) manages the organization's affairs between national conventions and serves as its board of directors. NEC members also serve on the Department Executive Committee. As your NEC member, I will fulfill my fiduciary duties of care, loyalty, and obedience, and will work to modernize the American Legion and advance our strategic goals.

The following areas require immediate attention. They directly impact our effectiveness, integrity, service quality, and ability to uphold our core values. Addressing these issues will strengthen our stability, reliability, and appeal to veterans.

- Board Orientation training for NEC, DEC, and Post Executive Committees: A comprehensive orientation at the start of each term is essential. It ensures all Executive Committee members quickly understand our mission, roles, responsibilities, and governance expectations, enabling effective and informed decision-making from day one. If elected, I will advocate for the immediate implementation of a formal orientation process to reinforce fiduciary obligations, strengthen performance, and support our mission.
- Approach each meeting with strategic thinking, thorough planning, critical questioning, active support, and decisive execution.
- We can improve tracking of California's nationally approved resolutions and prioritize their implementation. For example, resolution 9-2024 from District 21 seeks legislation to protect veteran immigrants and their families from deportation if they have no felony convictions and the veteran was honorably discharged. The American Legion supports the Veteran Service Recognition Act of 2025, which aims to prevent the unjust deportation of immigrant servicemembers and expand their opportunities for citizenship. As of 2026, there have been no

further updates on this resolution or legislation. I am committed to advocating for this issue to be a legislative priority of The American Legion.

- We can reassess the allocation of resources for our Veteran Service Officer (VSO) Division. California American Legion VSOs cost the Department \$723,000 annually, which is not sustainable. While our staff is effective, we need to identify alternative funding sources for this essential work. We should consider establishing an accredited volunteer VSO program, encourage County Supervisors to hire American Legion accredited VSOs, and expand training for Post Service Officers to better prepare veterans for meetings with accredited VSOs. Taking these steps now will maximize our impact.
- We must also ensure fairness in representation. I urge leadership to update and enforce a transparent process for selecting 'call-in' positions for National meetings and training. Selections should be based on operational needs, program cohesion, and relevant member skills, rather than personal campaign contributions, to avoid any perception of cronyism or pay-to-play. I encourage active participation in providing input to and from the Department Executive Committee when making these decisions.



Qualifications: American Legion

Post: I am a proud 33-year member of American Legion Post 365 in Vista, California, and served as Post Commander from 2003 to 2006 and 2010 to 2013. Key accomplishments include collaborating with fellow Legionnaires and the City of Vista to secure a \$1 million land swap and a \$360,000 forgiven loan, preserving Post 365's charter, and obtaining a more suitable property for our veteran community.

District: Served as 22nd District First Vice Commander from 2015 to 2017 and as the 22nd District Commander from 2017 to 2019. Our dedicated membership team and 29 motivated Legion Posts achieved 100% membership in three of four years. We remained the largest District in the Department of California with over 8,300 members.

Department: Served as Department Judge Advocate from 2020 to 2022 and as Chairman of the Department Personnel Committee from 2022 to 2025. I have been a California American Legion College (CALC) Facilitator since the inaugural class in 2017 and currently serve as Co-Dean and Training Committee Chair.

National: Served on the National Americanism Council (2012–2016), National Legislative Council (2016–2017), National Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission (2019–2023), and National Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Council (2023–2026).

[I Am The American Legion video from 2019](#)

Military background:

Retired United States Marine (1982–2002) with multiple overseas deployments, including Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Served at American Embassies in Beirut, Stockholm, and Madrid.

Mustang Marine: Advanced from E-2 to E-7 and retired as a Chief Warrant Officer (Marine Gunner), Infantry Weapons Officer.

Awards: Combat Action Ribbon, Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal (Gold Star in lieu of third award and one with combat “V”), Meritorious Unit Commendation, Navy Unit Commendation, National Defense Service Medal (with 1 star), Good Conduct Medal (with 4 stars), Coast Guard Meritorious Unit Citation, Kuwait Liberation Medal (Kuwait), Kuwait Liberation Medal (Saudi Arabia), Southwest Asia Service Medal, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal (with 1 star), Humanitarian Service Medal (with 2 stars), Marine Corps Overseas Service Ribbon, and Sea Service Deployment Ribbon (with 5 stars).

Affiliations: Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), 1st Marine Division Association, American Heroes Tribute, Associated Builders & Contractors of Southern California, and Sons of The American Legion.



Family: Daughter: Danna Marie Zandonatti; Sons: Luke Sands (12/6/1982–3/1/2022) and Zack Yates; Daughter-in-law: Ali Yates; Daughter's partner: Brian Pauling; Grandsons: Mason, Ty, Deklan, and Luke.

On June 28, 2026, I would be honored to receive your vote for the National Executive Committee (NEC) 2026–2028 term Cyates2002@gmail.com or (714) 719-9549.