Monday Caucus, August 31, 2026

Called to order at 8:47 a.m. by: Department Commander Janice Somers

Opening Ceremonies by: Department Commander Janice Somers

Invocation by: Department Chaplain Kathy Cash

POW/MIA Ceremony by: Department Sergeant-at-Arms Mike Smith

Pledge of Allegiance led by: Department Commander Janice Somers

Preamble led by: Area 4 Vice Commander Jeff Daly

Announcements by: Department Adjutant Sam Flores

Election of Delegates:

Department Adjutant Sam Flores read the names of the Delegates and Alternates in attendance checked in all those present. After reading Sam announced seven (7) open Delegate positions were available and were to be filled by elected Alternates who would be present for the full term of the National Convention.

Nominations were opened for Ethel Butler, Brian Fleming, Larry Williams, Genevieve Dominguez, Cory Vigil, George Tsang, Anthony Lyua, David Wong, and Natasha Pinedo.

Ethel Butler and Brian Fleming rescinded their nominations, leaving seven nominees for the seven available Delegate positions.

Jeffrey Sterling made the motion to elect the remaining seven Alternates as Delegates. Mike Green seconded the motion. A hand vote was conducted. (Passed)

The following Alternates were elected to Delegate status:

- Larry Williams
- Genevieve Dominguez
- Cory Vigil
- George Tsang
- Anthony Lyua
- David Wong
- Natasha Pinedo

Members elected as Delegates were directed to report to the back of the room following the Caucus to have their badges updated.

Steve Ramirez - Veterans Service Office

Veterans Service Office report.

Al Mendoza - Deported Veterans Resolution

Reported that the Department of California resolution concerning deported veterans advanced through National Security and Legislation and was identified as a priority issue for American Legion lobbyists in Washington. He stated that approximately 70,000 veterans may be affected worldwide and approximately 40,000 currently serving individuals may be subject to deportation. He emphasized that the issue affects veterans of many nationalities and requested continued support for the resolution and the use of Veterans Treatment Courts for qualifying minor offenses.

Auction item for missing cover – donation will be allocated to the Helmets 4 Heroes program

A missing cover belonging to Richard Lombardi, Post 283, was located and auctioned in accordance with Legion tradition. Bidding opened at $20.00 and closed at $100.00. Lois Flint submitted the winning bid. The $100.00 donation was designated for Helmets 4 Heroes.

Announcement – Kevin Niles Post 283 - California Night

Department Commander David Brambila directed the Department Sergeant-at-Arms to escort Kevin Niles to the podium. Kevin Niles announced that California Night would be held at the Louisville Slugger Factory and Museum. The factory and museum tour was scheduled for 6:00 p.m., followed by dinner at 7:00 p.m. Attendees were responsible for their own transportation. The event was full, with a waiting list maintained for any openings.

Candidate for National Commander Representative on behalf of Matthew Shuman

A National Vice Commander spoke on behalf of Matthew Shuman of Arizona, candidate for National Commander, and requested the support of the California delegation. The presentation reviewed Matthew Shuman's national legislative work, including the VA MISSION Act and LEGION Act, his work with the Membership Study Committee and National Security Commission, and his support for the Base Assessment and Servicemember Experience program. His proposed priorities included ending veteran suicide through Be the One and encouraging each member of the Legion Family to recruit one new member.

JD Bennett - Media & Communications Council, TAL

Encouraged posts to conduct Buddy Checks and reminded members to remain civil and professional when using social media in connection with The American Legion. Members were encouraged to pause, identify, acknowledge, and advance before responding online. Legiontown.org was identified as a resource for sharing post stories.

Reported that beginning in February 2027, The American Legion Magazine will be issued in a smaller format while retaining its regular content. The format change is expected to reduce annual mailing costs by approximately $2 million.

Mark Rice - Resolutions Assignment and Constitutional Amendment Committees

Reported that 53 resolutions were submitted for National consideration, with several returned for additional work. First-time Delegates were reminded that voting to approve a committee report also approves the committee's recommendations on the resolutions contained in that report unless a resolution is separately removed for consideration.

Reported on proposed amendments to Article III, Section 2 of the National Constitution concerning eligibility for membership in the American Legion Auxiliary. The recommended language removes references to gender while retaining applicable family-relationship eligibility requirements. Resolution 27 from Maryland was recommended for approval; Resolution 18 was ruled out of order because of substantially similar language.

Wes Schermann - Marketing Commission Liaison, TAL

Reported on efforts to modernize National marketing and engage younger veterans. The American Legion is working with an outside communications organization to improve media relations and maintain consistent messaging across LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, podcasts, and other digital platforms.

Vic Martin - Veterans Employment & Education Commission, TAL

Reported on presentations concerning performing arts as a tool for addressing conflict and emotions, improvements to veterans' education-benefit information and digital processing, apprenticeships, workforce training, employee retention, sustainable careers, and entrepreneurship.

Resolution 49 from Florida, supporting continued housing availability for student veterans during short academic breaks, was recommended for approval. Resolution 53 from Florida, concerning foreclosure protections for VA-guaranteed borrowers while the loss-mitigation program is restored, was referred to the Standing Commission on Veterans Employment & Education.

Department Commander David Brambila recognition of Vic Martin regarding removal as National Trainer and unable to teach during the National Convention

Vic Martin reported that he had been scheduled to teach classes for incoming District Commanders and on community engagement. The delegation recognized his qualifications and expressed support for his work as a National Instructor.

John Aldridge, PDC - Internal Affairs Commission

- Resolution 21, advisory use of video security systems at American Legion facilities - Rejected.
- Resolution 22, creation of Sons, Service and Legacy Auxiliary - Rejected.
- Resolution 33, Congressional Gold Medal for World War II nurses - Amended and recommended for approval.
- Resolution 35, increased income-tax deduction for volunteer mileage - Referred to the Standing Commission.
- Resolution 48, support for accredited service-dog training organizations - Amended and recommended for approval.
- Resolution 50, changing the title of Post Service Officer to Post Resource Officer - Referred to the Standing Commission.
- Resolution 52, Red Star Service matter - Referred to the Standing Commission.

Jeff Daly - Legislative Commission and Convention Committee

Provided a report on the Legislative Commission and Convention Committee. No resolutions were reported from the Convention Committee.

Larry Van Kuran - Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission

Provided the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission report, including presentations concerning pain treatment, women's health, community care providers, and other veterans' health matters.

Dennis Materesse - National Security

Reported on National Security resolutions. California Resolutions 28 and 30 were referred to the Standing Committee.

Nelson Lum - Law & Order/Homeland Security

Provided the Law & Order/Homeland Security report.

Ralph Jacob - Americanism Commission

Reported on Americanism programs. A mortgage-company program will provide $1,000.00 to a California American Legion program when an eligible mortgage is originated or transferred in California. Child Welfare Foundation grants totaling approximately $851,000.00 were awarded to nine organizations. Temporary Financial Assistance provided approximately $46,000.00, and the maximum individual grant increased from $1,000.00 to $2,500.00.

Presented a historical Department of California item from the 23rd National Convention held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, September 14-18, 1941. The item included historical travel and meal information from the Convention.

Andrea Kline - Mental Health Committee

Reported on the Department's Mental Health Committee and the mental wellness presentation held during the Department Convention. Community mental-health kits have been developed to help posts establish local mental wellness programs. Initial funding has been secured, and the kits are expected to be made available through the California store as part of a pilot program with selected posts.

Reported that the Palm Springs psychiatrist who sponsored the Convention luncheon has continued helping veterans obtain treatment and housing support. The VA may cover qualifying TMS treatment.

**Quick Break**

A brief stretch break was taken.

Gregory Taylor - Americanism Council, TAL Commission

Provided the Americanism Council report and emphasized the importance of California's participation in National Americanism programs and conferences.

Melissa Orduna - Credentials & Rules Convention Committee

Reported that the committee approved the Uniform Code of Procedure for the National Convention. California had 65,616 members as of August 3, 2026, resulting in 66 membership-based Delegates. With five Delegates at large, one Past National Commander, the Department Commander, and the National Executive Committeeperson, California's total delegation strength was 73.

David Fuller - Americanism Convention Committee

Reported on four resolutions. Resolutions 5 and 26 concerned the Eagle Scout program, including eligibility and changing references from Boy Scouts of America to Scouting America. Two resolutions concerning voter identification in federal elections, including Resolution 9, were recommended for approval.

Chris Yates - Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Convention Committee

Reported that 31 resolutions were considered. Eleven were referred to committee, five were rejected, and the remaining resolutions were approved. He advised that the complete report was

being prepared for posting so Delegates could review the resolutions before voting on the committee report.

Two California matters were discussed. The cancer-related resolution from Post 43 passed. The TECAVA matter was referred to committee. Members were reminded that advocacy on the TECAVA matter could continue regardless of the committee referral.

Mike Green - Americanism Committee

Reported on the 2026 National youth champions and Americanism awards:

- Oratorical champion - Juliet Etzel, Colorado Springs.
- Baseball academic award - Tyler Hanley, Pennsylvania.
- Junior three-position air rifle champion - Alexandra Ord.
- Precision air rifle champion - Maggie, West Virginia.
- Eagle Scout of the Year - Alexis.
- Boys Nation President - Sawyer Ray, Arkansas.
- National Education Award - Center for Constitutional Studies, Utah Valley University.
- Daniel J. O'Connor Americanism Trophy - Department of Virginia.
- Ralph T. O'Neil Education Award - Department of Florida.

No nomination was submitted for the Frank N. Belgrano Jr. Trophy relating to Scouting.

Michael Smith - Emblem Sales Committee

Reported on problems with the Emblem Sales computer and order-processing system. Increased customer-service calls identified broader operational issues, and approximately 10,000 of 50,000 orders required manual review. The system delayed complete orders when one customized or embroidered item was not ready. A correction was implemented in May 2026, and order routing was redesigned in June 2026 to improve workflow and processing times.

Address-recognition problems also required manual verification through the United States Postal Service and other sources before shipping labels could be prepared. Customer-service staffing increased from three representatives to six. Members were advised that calls and comments made while on hold may be recorded and to be mindful of their conversations.

Bill Hernandez - Detachment SAL Commander

Provided a report on the status of the Sons of The American Legion.

********** Recess for 10 Minutes **********

The Caucus reconvened following recess.

Past Department Commanders

Past Department Commanders Nick Rosa, David Brambila, and Larry Van Kuran participated in a question-and-answer session and shared their experience and knowledge with the delegation.

Questions and Answers

Melissa Orduna, Post 283, asked what constitutes a qualified candidate for American Legion office. David Brambila stated that the formal minimum is to be a member in good standing. Larry Van Kuran added that successful candidates should have Legion knowledge, be willing to learn from others, and not enter higher office as a blank slate. The panel also emphasized communication, problem-solving, execution, experience, performance in prior positions, and the ability to build support for the mission.

Melissa Orduna asked why certain matters supported by The American Legion, including voter-identification proposals, were handled through committees instead of being brought separately before the Convention floor. Ralph Jacob stated that the matter would proceed to the floor. David Fuller explained that National assigns resolutions to the committee with the relevant subject matter; committee members review and vote on the resolutions as representatives of their departments, and the Convention later votes on the committee report.

Jeff Daly, Post 43, expressed concern about The American Legion becoming involved in partisan matters and asked the panel to distinguish the minimum qualification to run from the qualities that predict success in office. The panel identified effective communication, understanding problems, developing and carrying out solutions, building support, gaining experience in different positions, and demonstrating performance as important qualities.

Andrea Kline, Area 5, District 21, Post 519, asked about the greatest hurdles or unexpected challenges experienced by the Past Department Commanders. Responses included balancing employment and travel, attending meetings throughout the Department, managing members' concerns through staff and the Judge Advocate, dealing with altered or misquoted communications, managing large volumes of invitations and messages, learning when to say no, practicing time management, and delegating responsibilities to Area Vice Commanders and others.

Liliana Armenta, District 22, asked what qualities women need to advance into Department leadership, noting that only two women had served as Department Commander during 107 Department Conventions. The panel encouraged women to pursue leadership without being discouraged by gender; learn each position; create meaningful goals where job descriptions are unclear; be creative, committed, and motivated; seek mentors; build skills that inspire others; address barriers directly; and put in the work necessary to demonstrate leadership. Commander Janice Somers was recognized as an example of a woman who advanced through Department leadership.

Department Chaplain Kathy Cash was recognized as a candidate for National Chaplain, and the delegation was encouraged to support her candidacy.

Announcements

The Western Caucus was announced for 2:30 p.m. in Room M108 of the Convention Center.

Members were asked to return to the head table any clear bag, cover, or other item picked up in error.

Closing

Closing Prayer by: Department Chaplain Kathy Cash

Recovery of POW/MIA Flag by: Department Sergeant-at-Arms Mike Smith

The Monday Caucus was adjourned at 11:43 a.m. by Department Commander 2025-2026 David Brambila.