

Convention Highlights

Monday, July 25, 2016
Joint Opening Session

Hillary Clinton: ‘We Won’t Privatize VA’

Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton received approving applause when she addressed one of VFW’s primary concerns. “We are not going to privatize VA,” she said. “We are going to reform it and make it work for every single veteran in America.” That includes ensuring access to “timely, quality care,” enhancing the coordination of care and improving benefits for women veterans—specifically, better reproductive health services and extended child-care options. Clinton also pledged to expand VA mental health services to end the “epidemic” of veteran suicides.

On the topic of reducing veterans homelessness, Clinton cited such cities as New Orleans, Philadelphia, Las Vegas and Houston as examples of communities effectively working toward that goal. Clinton told the audience that “we must end the tragedy of veteran homelessness.”

Emphasizing that America has “the world’s greatest military,” she said its commander-in-chief’s most “solemn” responsibility is sending troops into war. Clinton wants to “increase pressure” on North Korea, “stand up” to the Chinese in the South China Sea and “work with Russia” to reduce its nuclear stockpiles. To accomplish that, she said she would rely heavily on diplomacy: “It’s often the only way to avoid conflicts that can end up exacting a much greater cost.”

Regarding Islamist terrorism, she said “we need to lead other countries in stopping ISIS, al Qaeda and other radical jihadist groups.” She added, “We shouldn’t leave that to the rest of the world to figure out on its own—that won’t keep us safe. We have to protect ourselves against terrorists.”

Clinton supports strengthening the *Post-9/11 GI Bill*, saying quality educational benefits help to recruit and maintain an all-volunteer force. Her stance on this issue includes providing aid for veterans seeking training in technical fields or internships and apprenticeships for trade occupations.

Touching on employment, the former secretary of state said she would crack down on companies that discriminate or prey upon veterans. “They should be ashamed of themselves, and we are going to hold them accountable,” she said. She also would expand tax credits for firms that hire vets. Clinton called for better certification and credentialing programs, as well as expanded employment for military spouses.

In concluding her remarks, Clinton said presidential candidates should be as specific as possible when outlining their proposals. They also “should be held accountable” for “delivering results,” she said. “I know a lot of vets still feel invisible, powerless, like their country has forgotten them. It’s unacceptable, and we have to work together to make sure we end that. This is something that I care deeply about.” Veterans deserve a President who will honor their service with deeds, she stressed.

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D.G. Yuengling and Son, Inc., Donates \$100,000

Jennifer Yuengling, vice president of operations for America's oldest brewery, D.G. Yuengling and Son, Inc., presented \$100,000 to VFW. The donation is the result of the brewer's #LagersForHeroes program, which is promoted at restaurants, retailers and bars across the country. Yuengling, who said her grandfather participated in 37 missions as a waist gunner during WWII, added that the donation represented the beginning of a "multi-year" partnership with VFW.

SVA Counts 550,000 Members

Jared Lyon, president and CEO of Student Veterans of America (SVA) provided delegates with an overview of the organization, noting the group now has 1,400 chapters with some 550,000 members. A member of Post 3308 in Tallahassee, Fla., Lyon said there are 1.1 million veterans pursuing higher education. "We envision a future brighter than our storied past," he said. He thanked VFW for its work in getting the *Post-9/11 GI Bill* passed. "No matter what we needed, VFW was there for us," he said.

Recognizing Outstanding Service

Army Brig. Gen. Patrick Roberson accepted VFW's *Armed Forces Award* on behalf of all Army Special Forces, commonly known as Green Berets. Pointing out that Green Berets are currently serving in 70 different countries, the VFW member of Post 3270 in Jacksonville, Fla., said the warriors are "the finest America has to offer."

Staten Island artist Scott LoBaido received VFW's *Americanism Award* for his patriotic U.S. flag murals he painted on VFW Posts across the country in 2015. He also is known for painting the world's largest U.S. flag in Houston—it is 150,000 square feet and required 900 gallons of paint. "This is my calling," he said, "to bring light upon the goodness of America." Showing a "22" written on his hand, LoBaido said he plans another U.S. tour to highlight the number of veterans who commit suicide daily.

Also receiving awards were All-American commanders, All-American Triple Crown awardees and Legacy Life contest winners. Ken Kraft from Post 12140 in Lake Oswego, Ore., was named *VFW National Recruiter of the Year* for recruiting 328 members. The Department of Arizona received accolades for 49 consecutive years of membership growth.

Various Awards and Speakers

Scott Stump, CEO of the National Desert Storm War Memorial, provided an update on the memorial's progress. Currently, the group is considering locations in the D.C. area, including on the Arlington, Va., side of the Potomac River. Stump, a VFW life member of Post 748 in Knox, Ind., noted that VFW was the first vets group to provide support when it donated \$100,000 last year as part of a \$500,000 pledge. He thanked the VFW Departments of Pennsylvania, Texas and Tennessee for additional donations raised at their Department conventions.

Highlighting USAA's commitment to hiring veterans, CEO Stuart Parker, a member of Post 76 in San Antonio, said his company has hired 10,000 veterans or their family members in the past 10 years. He said USAA's goal is to hire enough veterans or their family members to comprise 30% of its staff.

Charlotte Mayor Jennifer Roberts officially welcomed VFW to the Queen City. Roberts, whose father and grandfather served in the military, said there are 65,000 veterans in Mecklenburg County.

VFW Auxiliary President Francisca Guilford was awarded the *VFW Gold Medal of Merit and Citation*.

Grayson Campbell, national Voice of Democracy winner, presented his winning essay.

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