



Convention Highlights

Tuesday, July 24, 2018
Business Meeting

President Trump Says Vets Help Restore ‘the Greatness of America’

President Donald Trump today outlined his plans for a stronger national defense and provided a progress report on his veterans initiatives. Noting that his administration has secured \$700 billion for defense this year and \$716 billion next year, Trump said the Department of Defense plans to order: 147 F-35 Lightning Fighters, 239 Apache and Black Hawk helicopters, 19 major naval vessels and 8,000 Humvees. He added that 30,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines will be added to the ranks. He touted the creation of America’s “sixth military service,” or a space force. “My administration is committed to ensuring our warfighters have the tools, the resources and the firepower that they need to defeat our enemies with overwhelming force,” he said. “America is a peace-loving nation. But if conflict is forced upon us, we will defend ourselves. And if we must, we will fight, and we will do nothing but win.”

The president said the U.S. is defeating the “bloodthirsty killers known as ISIS.” He also noted that U.S. troops in Afghanistan are making progress “for the first time in years” thanks to “unnecessary restraints” that have been lifted. “Those who risk their life and limb for our country,” Trump said to rousing applause, “deserve rules of engagement that give them the best opportunity to finally defeat the enemy.”

Calling his June 12 meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un “fantastic,” Trump said images captured Tuesday showed North Korea dismantling a “key missile site,” a first step in the denuclearization of North Korea. He said the details to bring home the remains of an estimated 5,300 Americans who died in North Korea during the Korean War are still being finalized. “I hope that very soon, these fallen warriors will begin coming home to lay at rest in American soil,” he said. On the issue of Iran, Trump added that while he withdrew the U.S. from the “horrible, one-sided” nuclear deal signed in 2015, he’s ready for new talks.

On the subject of VA, Trump announced that Robert Wilkie received Senate confirmation Monday night as the new VA Secretary. The president touted last year’s *VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act*, which permits the firing of inept VA employees. He said VA will continue to expand its telehealth and walk-in clinics so that veterans can “get what they need.” Addressing the VA claims process, Trump said the Decision Ready Claims process is fully implemented. Under this, claims can be completed in under two weeks. “We’re striving for one day,” he said. “It used to be many, many months.” Trump praised VFW for its assistance in passing the *VA MISSION Act*, which offers vets private care options and extends caregiver benefits, a VFW priority goal.

Calling them “national treasures,” Trump recognized all WWII vets in attendance, asking one in particular to join him on stage. Allen Q. Jones of Post 21 in Connellsville, Pa., asked the president to autograph a photo for him. The 70-year VFW member also asked if he could bring his family to the Oval Office for his 95th birthday in April, to which the president replied, “Anytime you want. Anytime.”

Trump concluded by thanking VFW members for their service in preserving U.S. freedoms. “Because of your service, your courage and your example, we are restoring the dreams and the glory and the greatness of America,” he said. “We will never give in. We will never give up. And we will never stop fighting for our country, our flag and our freedom. Together we will keep on fighting.”

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VFW Award Recipients and Speakers

National Rifle Association President Oliver North spoke on the importance of school safety and promoted his organization's National School Shield program, which offers schools the knowledge and planning of security experts to help safeguard against potential threats. The retired Marine Corps lieutenant colonel and VFW life member said 12 of his 17 grandchildren are headed back to school next month. Calling it "unacceptable," North said that banks and airports are more secure than our nation's schools. "I believe that protecting our children while they're learning in our classrooms should be a national imperative," he said. "Children should be free to safely go to school." The Vietnam veteran encouraged VFW members to inform their local schools about the National School Shield program. "It's free of politics and free of charge," he said. "No one has ever offered anything like this."

Fox News anchor Harris Faulkner touted her new book *9 Rules of Engagement: A Military Brat's Guide to Life and Success*. The six-time Emmy Award-winning journalist offered her appreciation for America's veterans. "We do nothing well without our military," said Faulkner, whose father was a career Army pilot. "You keep us focused on what is important." The self-proclaimed "military brat" said while there are certainly heroes on the battlefield, there are heroes on the homefront. She added that her mother is one such homefront hero who taught her lessons that stuck with her throughout life: "Do things for people who can offer you nothing more than their company," Faulkner's mom told her. Following her speech, Faulkner spent a few hours autographing copies of her book.

Kelly McKeague, director of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, thanked VFW for its "extraordinary" support. Specifically, he cited the June 12 meeting between President Trump and North Korean Dictator Kim Jong Un, saying a letter from VFW was "instrumental and paved the way" for the meeting. More than 7,600 troops remain unaccounted for from the Korean War, with 5,300 presumed to be north of the Korean Demilitarized Zone. "As a result of that meeting, 5,300 families now have restored hope," McKeague said. "None of these accomplishments would have been achieved without the staunch support of VFW."

Travis Watson, retired Army lieutenant colonel and clinical director with Walgreens, discussed the importance of good mental health, noting that getting a mental health screening is one of the most important things a person can do. Watson, a member of VFW's Department of Maryland, said about 50 percent of those diagnosed with some form of mental illness do not seek treatment: "As fellow veterans and family members, we can all do something."

Jared Lyon, president and CEO of Student Veterans of America (SVA), thanked VFW for its partnership with SVA, adding that its "stronger today than it ever has been before." The member of Post 3308 in Tallahassee, Fla., said SVA is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. It counts more than 1,500 chapters. "SVA needs VFW so we can go far together," he said. "We owe our success to the Veterans of Foreign Wars."

Known as the "Good Cemeterian," Andrew Lumish accepted a *VFW James E. Van Zandt Citizenship Award* for his work in maintaining the headstones of veterans. Lumish has cleaned more than 500 in the more than five years he has been doing this. "I want to leave a legacy my son can be proud of," said Lumish, whose work is primarily in Florida. He recognized Jen Ambruster for her genealogical research. "She is equal to what it is I do," Lumish said. "I don't know what I would do without her."

VFW presented its *News Media Award* to Maximilian Uriarte for his "Terminal Lance" comic strip. Uriarte, who served with the 3rd Bn., 3rd Marines from 2006-2010 and deployed to Iraq twice, created "Terminal Lance" to satirize the Marine Corps. "Marines are the funniest, most profoundly crude individuals," he said. "But they also are deeply human in a way like no one else in the world."

All-American Post, District and Department commanders were recognized, as were the All-American Triple Crown awardees. Streamers were presented to the top recruiting Departments in each conference: Nebraska, Big 10; Delaware, Eastern; Mississippi, Southern; and Oregon, Western. Ken Kraft was named Recruiter of the Year, an honor he previously received in 2015 and 2016.

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