

The American Legion



For God and country

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VA chief vows to The American Legion, “We will end vet homelessness.”

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Aug. 25, 2009) – Secretary Eric Shinseki of the Department of Veterans Affairs says he and the Obama administration are determined to end homelessness among military veterans. His promise was made as the retired four-star U.S. Army General spoke at the opening session of The American Legion’s 91st national convention in Louisville, Ky.

In what he called his “seven month report,” referring to his term of office thus far as VA Secretary, Shinseki pointed to the over-representation of veterans among the populations of those with mental health issues, drug abuse, alcoholism and homelessness. He said the new Presidential administration and his agency in particular are working very hard to correct this discrepancy as well as enroll many more eligible veterans into VA healthcare, now serving a fraction of those who could receive its benefits, and to address the staggering backlog of benefits claims now facing VA case workers. Retraining, already underway, will help, said Secretary Shinseki.

In his remarks, Shinseki twice cited the Department of Veterans Affairs motto, inscribed on metal plaques flanking the department’s front entrance in Washington, D.C. where, he said, “I go to work every day.” The inscription reads, *“To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan.”* The words are from President Abraham Lincoln’s second inaugural address.

On a more positive topic, Shinseki lauded the enactment of the new Post 9/11 GI Bill, which expands and modernizes the award of higher education benefits to military veterans. Recalling the post-World War II economic boom attributed in part to the exponential growth of college education among veterans, the VA Secretary predicted that, because of the newly instituted benefits package, “we are on the verge of that happening again.”

Secretary Shinseki joined fellow convention speakers Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and General David Petraeus, Commander of the U.S. Central Command, at the Legion convention’s opening ceremonies this morning.

With a current membership of 2.5-million wartime veterans, The American Legion was founded in 1919 on the four pillars of a strong national security, veterans affairs, Americanism, and youth programs. Legionnaires work for the betterment of their communities through more than 14,000 posts across the nation.

General Petraeus honored with The American Legion's Distinguished Service Medal

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Aug. 25, 2009) – Thousands of wartime veterans rose to cheer as General David H. Petraeus, Commander of the U.S. Central Command, was awarded The American Legion's Distinguished Service Medal this morning.

The Legion's National Commander, David K. Rehbein, began his tribute to the Iraqi conflict leader by quoting critics who had declared, "The war is lost," and "The surge will never work."

"Yet," said Rehbein, "General David Petraeus, the chief advocate of the military troop surge and the Commander of the Multi-National Forces Iraq, refused to share this pessimism. He never lost faith in America's fighting men and women. He would be the first to tell you that the credit for the success in Iraq belongs to those who served and are still serving over there."

General Petraeus himself reiterated this point as he accepted The American Legion's medal and in remarks a short time later. He also vowed to wage a vigorous campaign against insurgents in Afghanistan as U.S. forces aid the fragile country in its quest for self-sufficiency and freedom from tyrannical rule.

The award, the veterans' service organization's highest honor, was presented during The American Legion's 91st national convention in Louisville, Ky. this morning, General Petraeus joined fellow convention speaker Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at the Legion convention's opening ceremonies.

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Admiral Mullen to The American Legion: "We Cannot Win from The Pentagon"

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Aug. 25, 2009) – With scholarly references to "Lawrence of Arabia", the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff told members of The American Legion today that trust and a partnership borne of understanding -- not simply military might -- is what is needed to quell conflicts and establish rules of law in troubled regions of the Middle East.

"Despite all that's been done to bring stability to that region, really since the end of World War I," said Admiral Mike Mullen, "we are still learning about the various cultures that shape the region's landscape. Because understanding takes time and without consistent engagement – a willingness to see things from another's perspective – there will always be a trust deficit. And where trust is lacking, partnerships falter."

Mullen cited the example of British officer T.E. Lawrence as one of enlightened leadership during the so called Arab Revolt of 1916 to 1918. "During World War I, (he) and a few others committed themselves to learning the customs, the languages and the cultures of the people of the Middle East. They fought beside them; earned their friendship. But, most importantly, they won their trust."

This principle of combining a strong military force with cultural sensitivity applies equally to today's conflicts centered on Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, Mullen said. In his words, "we cannot win from the Pentagon."

"You have to be there," he said. "You have to see and hear firsthand what the issues are. You can't hope to see problems through someone else's eyes if you aren't looking into those eyes."

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff made his remarks before delegates at The American Legion's 91st national convention in Louisville, Ky. this morning. He joined fellow convention speaker General David Petraeus, Commander of the U.S. Central Command, at the Legion convention's opening ceremonies.

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American Legion Honors Armed Forces Servicemembers for Volunteer Efforts

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Aug. 25, 2009) – Representatives from the five armed services were honored today by the nation’s largest wartime veterans’ organization.

The American Legion presented the Spirit of Service award to Sergeant Michael A. Ros, U.S. Army; Petty Officer Third Class Matthew Stroup, U.S. Navy; Sergeant Nikolai N. Atkinson-Pettigrew, U.S. Marine Corps; Staff Sergeant Tony M. Jacobsmeier, U.S. Air Force, and Petty Officer Second Class Stephen Diggs, U.S. Coast Guard during the organization’s 91st National Convention, being held here August 25-27.

The award was presented for each of the recipient’s volunteer service in their local communities.

This is the tenth annual presentation of the award, which includes shaped, etched glass mounted on a marble base, as well as a one-year membership in The American Legion.

National Commander David K. Rehbein, who presented the awards to the service members along with Admiral Michael Mullen, U.S. Navy, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Gen. David Petraeus, Commander, U.S. Central Command, explained the purpose of the award.

“As an organization of wartime veterans we understand and embrace the concept of service to community, state and nation,” Rehbein said. “These outstanding military members represent the very finest qualities of America – a steadfast commitment to serve their country and their fellow Americans.”

To receive this recognition the individual must be an outstanding military professional – and be actively involved in volunteer projects in the community during off-duty hours.

“Volunteerism is at the heart of what The American Legion does ... and it is this dedication to service and community volunteerism that keeps the nation’s largest veterans organization growing,” Rehbein said.

“We know about service to others. We also know that those in uniform today – from all branches of military service – active duty, reserves and National Guard members – often go out of their way to make a difference in the lives of so many others in the communities in which they live. Today, The American Legion honors these outstanding Americans who reflect the great spirit of service to others that the founders of our organization considered essential.”

Rehbein said that these military men and women being honored fit the bill and are representative of thousands of their peers who make up the finest fighting force in the world.

“Each of them has demonstrated a strong commitment to serving others, a spirit of service that deserves the highest recognition The American Legion can provide.”

Each of the members was selected by their individual services. The American Legion provided for accommodations, meals and travel during their time in Louisville. They participated in the ceremonial opening of the convention, were featured in The American Legion convention parade, attended the National Commander’s Banquet as distinguished guests and as the newest members of The American Legion interacted with their fellow veterans of several generations.