

Washington Midwinter Conference Update and Path Forward

Midwinter Conference Update

The Midwinter Conference for the Washington American Legion was held on February 2-3 in Olympia, WA. Approximately 100 members of The American Legion participated in the conference.

National Vice Commander Randy Edwards of Utah presented remarks after the opening ceremony. PNC David Rehbein represented Tom Bock, chair of the reorganizing committee, National VA&R chair Autrey James and National Judge Advocate Mark Seavey were present and gave remarks as did Service Officer Easter Luli and Detachment Commander Roger Howden.

Training classes were presented by Administrator Barbara Lombrano and National VA&R Chair James on the duties and responsibilities of District and Post Officers respectively. That was followed by reports from the various Department Committees.

A joint session was held Saturday morning beginning with the Four Chaplains ceremony organized by Past Chaplain Larry Haas. After the joint session, reports were received from the District Commanders interspersed with a training session on MyLegion.org by National Staff member Dave Sutton.

The remainder of the conference was devoted to a discussion of the path forward.

Path Forward

The remainder of the conference dealt with the current state of The American Legion in Washington. PNC David Rehbein discussed the path to reinstatement of the charter and National Judge Advocate Mark Seavey discussed common mistakes made by Post, district and Department leadership.

The path forward contains three major steps; 1) the National Executive Committee (NEC) approves a recommendation from the reorganization committee to reinstate, 2) the Washington Convention adopts a new Constitution and Bylaws to govern the Department, and 3) the Washington Convention elects new officers to oversee the reinstated Department. As always though, what seem to be simple steps becomes more complex.

1. The NEC approves a recommendation to reinstate the charter. That recommendation can only happen if it contains a set of conditions by which the reinstated Department and the reorganizing committee would work together for a specified period to turn over the business of the Department from the committee to the Department. Those conditions have yet to be discussed in the committee.
2. A new Constitution and Bylaws are adopted by the Washington convention. Approval of a new set of governing documents would best occur if a draft of those documents by Washington Legionnaires were presented to the convention for discussion. Work on that draft is beginning in a working group organized by the National Judge Advocate. Their work will be presented to a constitutional convention to be held in late May or early June.

The constitutional convention will be composed of two (2) delegates from each district. Those delegates **must** be chosen by election at the Spring 2024 District

Conferences. Delegates will only be seated at the constitutional convention if they present a statement signed by the District leadership certifying their election. The draft documents produced by that constitutional convention **must** be approved unanimously in order to be presented to the Washington convention for discussion and approval.

In addition to drafting the Constitution and Bylaws, the constitutional convention will be asked to make a recommendation for the method of voting at the upcoming Department Convention. That recommendation will be among the first items presented at the convention since all subsequent convention actions must be approved by vote.

3. Election of new Department officers will be accomplished at the Washington convention following approval of the new Constitution and Bylaws. Regarding that election, it is well established that any Washington Legionnaire can run for any Department office with no official restrictions applied.

It should be agreed however that candidates for the offices at this election should provide the maximum amount of information to the convention delegates. We are recommending that all candidates begin by preparing a resume that includes both their American Legion history as well as the personal achievements that prepares that candidate for overseeing the operation of the Department.

We hope that candidates will obtain a Post endorsement and then present that endorsement at their district convention for consideration. Space on the Department website will be reserved for endorsements and resumes and notice will be sent through Constant Contact when new candidate material is posted in that section of the website.

Required Action by All

Much work remains to be done before the NEC spring meeting and the Washington convention. That work requires a cooperative effort by all Washington Legionnaires. It remains the reorganizing committee's belief that the cause of Washington's problems lies mainly in the fact that control of the Department and to a great extent the Districts was performed under the micromanagement of the Department leadership.

In order for this problem to be resolved and the Department charter to be reinstated, it is necessary for the Posts but especially the Districts to be responsible and especially accountable for their actions. The most obvious way to see this problem is in the membership standings. Washington has been in the bottom 10% of the Departments in those standings. The District reports on Saturday, however, were almost all very positive.

In order for the Legionnaires of Washington to regain ownership of their Department, the Districts must recognize the problems currently in existence and develop solutions. It will be necessary to reject the false positivity that inhabits the Districts now.

If the committee does not see actions taking place for the Legionnaires at the Post and District level to take ownership of their actions and be accountable, that may cause the committee to delay the recommendation to the NEC. That would be disappointing to all, including the committee, but the committee is ready to make that decision if Washington is not considered ready to take ownership control of their own affairs.