

Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2009
Business Session

ASTRONAUTS RECOUNT HISTORIC SPACE FLIGHTS

VFW honored two astronauts at today's business session. Scott Carpenter and Buzz Aldrin both received VFW's *Aviation and Space Award* for their pioneering roles in space exploration. Carpenter flew the second U.S. manned orbital flight on May 24, 1962, orbiting Earth three times in his Aurora 7 spacecraft. The Korean War vet focused on America's rivalry with the Soviet Union in both the Cold War and the space race. "Men and women in a totalitarian society are unable to compete with those in a free society," he said. "That's why the Soviets lost. We emerged victorious in the space race war because we live in freedom." He urged VFW to use its "bully pulpit" to guarantee "Tricare for life for all veterans."

Aldrin, also a Korean War vet, said, "In all the items on my resume, I am clearly most proud of my military service." He spoke fondly of the fellowship he shared with other aviators during the "Forgotten War." Aldrin forfeited a scholarship to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for an education at West Point. He noted that 22 of the 24 astronauts who have been to the moon are veterans, and those who resigned their commissions should be elevated to two-star general status at "at no cost to the government." He said "they were in space combat of another sort with the Soviets." *The New York Times* bestselling author added that all 24 moon explorers should be named "honorable lunar ambassadors" to let the international community know they were pioneers for space research.

On behalf of World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), "Sgt. Slaughter" accepted the Commander-in-Chief's *Gold Medal of Merit*. WWE regularly visits Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., and the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., as well as performing annual Christmas shows in Iraq and Afghanistan. Slaughter compared its efforts to boost morale to those of the Bob Hope USO shows. "This is an award that doesn't come along very often for an entertainment company like ours," he said. "We are all very honored and humbled to be recognized."

Kelly Shackelford of the Liberty Legal Institute urged VFW members to spread the word about an upcoming Supreme Court decision regarding the Mojave Cross (a

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veterans' memorial in the National Mojave Desert Preserve in southeastern California). "The enemy is coming over the hill on Oct. 7," he said. "Let's be prepared to win." VFW Post 7264 in Joshua Tree, Calif., is located in the vicinity and is behind this effort. He thanked VFW "for taking the point" and encouraged members to visit www.donttearmedown.com.

Brig. Gen. Michael Garrett represented the Army's Recruiting Command as he and Commander-in-Chief Glen Gardner signed a memorandum of understanding between the two organizations. Garrett listed five ways VFW can help the Army recruit new members: speaking engagements, reaching out to local military recruiters, inviting recruiters to VFW functions, encouraging corporate participation and partnering as tutors.

Garrett emphasized the importance of the partnership when he said that "less than three out of ten 17-to-24-year-olds are fully qualified to serve in the military." He added that "VFW embodies what makes this nation great."

Dave Christian of the Legion of Valor and a 42-year VFW life member highlighted the need for better equipment for today's war fighters and health care for veterans. He also touched on the importance of treating PTSD.

The Department of Arizona was recognized with a citation for 42 years of consecutive membership growth.

Post 7806 in Manton, Mich., received the *Fred C. Hall Outstanding Community Project Award* and a \$1,000 check for its role in establishing the Manton Areas Historical Museum and Veterans Memorial in Manton.

Dennis Cullinan was awarded the *Distinguished Service Medal* for 26 years of service.

Passage of *Res. 308*—Retain the Selective Service System—was announced.

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