VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.

The VFW Guards the Guardians

Dec 02, 2008

Robert F. Dorr's December 1 commentary, "VFW, Legion must modernize in order to thrive" is interesting reading but regrettably focuses on archaic stereotypes that are simply re-hashing many of his embedded misunderstandings of what veterans service organizations really accomplish.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U. S. was founded in 1899 by Spanish-American and Philippine War veterans who returned home to a government that bore little responsibility to care for wounds or rehabilitation. Since then, and through every war and conflict in the 20th and 21st centuries, the VFW has led the way to promote strong military and veterans' legislation.

Our accomplishments are significant, from helping to create the Department of Veterans Affairs, the World War II GI Bill, and Agent Orange and Gulf War undiagnosed illnesses legislation, to leading the way to today's traumatic injury disability insurance and the new better GI Bill for the 21st Century.

We would not be celebrating our 110th birthday next year if we were stuck in the past. We incorporate the best practices from each generation and move forward, yet some practices are sacrosanct: we stand for the flag of our country, recite the Pledge of Allegiance and sing the National Anthem. We open our meetings with prayers, just as military units did and continue to do before going out on missions. This is not Old School; this is what real, caring Americans do.

The VFW is the largest organization of combat veterans in the nation. Every one of our 1.6 million members has been, or currently is deployed to a war-zone, and our families have shared in the combat experience. We may wear what some regard as funny hats at rallies, but without a visible reminder of who we are, we might just as well be a group of bystanders with no collective experience or voice.

Mr. Dorr opined that our Ladies Auxiliary be dissolved and absorbed into the parent organization. That's impossible because of our Congressional Charter. But, more importantly, this proud, productive, 600,000-strong organization donates millions of dollars and volunteers millions of hours every year to make our communities better places to live. They are auxiliary members because they choose to be; they are the wife, sister,

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daughter or mother of a VFW member. A similar membership criterion exists for the VFW Men's Auxiliary.

Mr. Dorr asserts that the VFW is failing to attract current war veterans. Not true.

More than 70,000 post-9/11 military men and women have joined our ranks, a number that grows larger every day with veterans, active-duty military, Guard and Reservists. And this is a higher percentage than when WWII veterans joined. We hope they have joined in these numbers because they believe VFW is relevant. And, they become involved because they understand it was relevant when the VFW helped almost 90,000 veterans last year receive $1 billion in earned entitlements from the government; gave more than $2.2 million in grants through our Military Assistance Program to support morale boasting activities including Christmas parties for the children of our deployed servicemembers; provided $600,000 to help military families through temporary unforeseen financial emergencies and donated more than 10 million free phone cards to deploying troops. In addition, VFW provides $3.2 million in annual youth scholarships and donates almost $60 million annually to local community service projects. All of this comes primarily from the benevolence of our members. That type of generosity is never out of touch and really says it all on the relevance of the VFW.

Sincerely,
Glen Gardner, Jr.
VFW Commander-in-Chief