

McCain, Obama to Address VFW National Convention

Aug 14, 2008

WASHINGTON — The two presumptive presidential candidates have accepted invitations to speak next week to the 109th national convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S., which starts tomorrow at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Fla. The event is not open to the public.

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) is scheduled to speak on Monday, followed by Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) on Tuesday.

The appearance of both presidential candidates continues a long standing VFW tradition to provide a platform for those seeking the nation's highest office to address America's oldest major veterans' organization, even though the VFW is prohibited from offering endorsements.

"For the candidates, this is their opportunity to address the national convention of America's oldest major veterans' organization and the nation's largest organization of combat veterans," said VFW National Commander George J. Lisicki, a Vietnam veteran from Carteret, N.J.

"What the VFW membership wants to know is how each candidate would prosecute the war on terrorism and protect America through strong national defense and homeland security programs. We also want to know how they would enhance military and veteran healthcare programs, benefits, and Quality of Life initiatives."

The opportunity also permits the VFW delegates – thousands of combat veterans of every American conflict from World War II through Iraq and Afghanistan – to evaluate each candidate in one setting.

Known as an organization strong on national defense and veterans' and military family rights, Lisicki said the VFW's 1.6 million members are also as diverse politically as they are individually, which tracks with national polls taken during the 2004 presidential race.

According to three USA Today/CNN/Gallup polls, America's veterans identified themselves

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politically as 47 percent Republican, 42 percent Democrat and 11 percent Independent. Ideologically, moderates and conservatives accounted for 43 percent each, with 16 percent of those surveyed calling themselves liberal. More important, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, is that 74 percent of America's (then) 23.7 million veteran population voted in the 2004 presidential election, compared to only 63 percent of the general population.

“Including 2.2 million military service personnel and all of our spouses and adult-age children brings the nation’s veteran family to well over 50 million Americans,” said Lisicki. “A fifth of the nation’s adult population is a voting bloc that absolutely cannot be ignored by any politician at any level, regardless of political party.”

Lisicki wants both candidates to leave knowing that “Veterans matter, veterans care, and veterans vote.”

Approximately 10,000 VFW and Ladies Auxiliary delegates will represent the total organization membership of 2.2 million at the weeklong convention. Their mission is to approve new national priorities to guide the VFW as it lobbies Congress on issues important to the nation’s veterans, servicemembers and their families.

Convention delegates will elect a new VFW national commander and recognize prominent individuals for their support of veterans and military personnel, to include Sen. Jim Webb (D-Va.), hall of fame entertainers Ann-Margret and Mickey Rooney, and retired Marine Corps Gen. Peter Pace, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Also addressing the delegates will be Veterans Affairs Secretary James Peake, acting Air Force Secretary Michael Donley, and Army Chief of Staff Gen. George Casey, among many others.

NOTE TO MEDIA: Only registered and credentialed media from bona fide news organizations will be approved to cover convention activities. A Daybook of speakers, dates and times will be available. To register, contact Peggy Allee beginning tomorrow at (407) 685-4058 or 4059, in room 203A of the Orange County Convention Center, or via e-mail at pallee@vfw.org. Additional VFW onsite contacts are VFW National Headquarters communications director Jerry Newberry at jnewberry@vfw.org or cell 816-835-1851, and VFW Washington Office public affairs director Joe Davis at jdavis@vfw.org or cell 202-374-9998.