116th VFW National Convention Rolls Into Pittsburgh

President to speak Tuesday

Jul 14, 2015

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Up to12,000 members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and its Auxiliaries are rolling into the Keystone State this weekend to elect new leadership and to approve resolutions that will guide the national organization's advocacy efforts on Capitol Hill, and its veteran and military support programs across the country. The 116th VFW National Convention begins Saturday at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center in Pittsburgh. The event is closed to the public.

"We are very grateful to President Obama for choosing to address America's oldest and largest major war veterans' organization," said VFW National Commander John W. Stroud, a retired Air Force first sergeant from Hawthorne, Nev. The president, who is scheduled to speak Tuesday, last spoke before the VFW at its national conventions in 2009 and 2012, and prior to then as a presidential candidate in 2007 and 2008.

The president's appearance continues a long standing VFW tradition to provide the commander-in-chief a platform to address issues of importance to veterans, military service members and their families. Stroud said this is especially important during a time of war and instability abroad, and continued economic belt tightening at home.

"What we hope to hear is how he will continue to take the fight to our enemies, while keeping America safe through strong national defense and homeland security programs," he said. "We also want to know how he will create, enhance and protect veteran and military health care programs and Quality of Life initiatives, such as educational benefits, job training and employment programs, as well as hear a renewed White House commitment to return our fallen from their battlefields."

The 12,000 VFW and Ladies Auxiliary delegates will represent the organization's total membership of nearly 1.9 million at the weeklong convention. Their mission will be to approve new national priorities to guide the VFW as it lobbies Congress on issues important to the nation's veterans, service members and their families. Convention delegates will also

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elect a new VFW national commander, Pittsburgh native John A. Biedrzycki Jr., and recognize prominent individuals and organizations for their support of veterans and military personnel.

National awards to be presented at the VFW's 116th National Convention include:
• The VFW Dwight D. Eisenhower Award to Gen. James Mattis, U.S. Marine Corps retired;
•The VFW Armed Services Award to all U.S. Army Medics, accepted by Command Sgt. Maj. Gerald Ecker;
•VFW National Teacher Awards to Ann Parker Komara, Ottobine Elementary School, Dayton, Va.; Melinda Hamilton, River Bend Middle School, Claremont, N.C.; and Craig Blackman, Indian River High School, Chesapeake, Va.;
•The VFW Citizenship Award to the Arlington Ladies, accepted by Margaret Mensch (representing the Army), Paula McKinley (Navy), Jean Anderegg (Air Force), and Maggi Paar (Coast Guard);
•The VFW Gold Medal of Merit to Patrick Hallinan, executive director of Army National Military Cemeteries;
•$30,000 VFW Voice of Democracy scholarship winner Adam Densmore; and
•From the VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids, Mich., 11-year-old Zane Kemp, the 2015 VFW Buddy Poppy Child.

Invited guest speakers include Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency Director Mike Linnington, Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf, Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto, and Rep. Mike Doyle (D-14th/PA), among many others.

The VFW National Convention is not open to the public, but videowill stream live at www.vfw.org beginning at 8 a.m., Eastern, July 20-22. Only registered and credentialed media from bona fide news organizations will be approved to cover convention activities. To pre-register, contact VFW Communications Manager Randi Law at the VFW National Headquarters at rlaw@vfw.org. Onsite registration begins July 18 at the VFW Communications Office inside Hall A of the David L. Lawrence Convention Center, phones 412-325-6044 or 6045.