

March 8, 2024

Sandra Petermann, National Security Chairman, Department of North Dakota

Report on National Security, Washington DC Conference, February 26-27, 2024

Some of my highlights was the opportunity to attend the Washington DC Conference. Monday morning started early with our first meeting at 7:30 A.M., where we met with our team leaders. National Security: Ann Rehbein, National Chair - Border Security, Enforcement, Defense State, BASE Program: Visit bases, determine quality of life. Discussion: Securing a better life for those serving in harm's way, Networking, share info. VA&R: Pam Ray, National Chair - Need more volunteers and report. Legislative: Donna Dillard, National Chair - ALA Advocacy Guide, study TAL Legislative Agenda brochure, Point papers. I learned so much and am very grateful for the opportunity to attend. The time we had to reminisce with the women of the American Legion Auxiliary and our Legion Family. Also, the opportunity to visit with our Senators and or their aide. There was nothing that I did not enjoy. It is always good to visit with everyone, as we all have the same goal.

We all received a packet with materials to share with our Senators. At 9:00 we met in the International Ballroom along with Legionnaires. There was a discussion regarding Border Security. The Defense Supplement contained numerous bipartisan provisions to tighten security around the border. Congress was asked to pass the bipartisan FY2024 Defense Supplemental bill which would increase border security funding and continue to allow for deportations at the border. Along with other items on the paper they received. Another m of importance that was discussed with our senators was the GI Bill for Honorable Service, which would allow those servicemembers who receive a "general eligibility under honorable conditions" access to VA educational benefits. Suicide prevention was mentioned in what can be done to help our veterans as 17.5 veterans commit suicide daily. We also asked our senators to support resolution number 83; Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record, so that our veterans can receive safe and efficient help without harm or undue burden on normal VA functions. The PACT Act was discussed as well as paying the Coast Guard, as it is still under the Department of Homeland Security instead of DOD. While some of these bills are either under the works, need more work done and/or they will be working on them.

The Defense-State Liaison office spoke about State Policy Priorities for 2024. They included: Military Family Anti-Discrimination Status, Military Spouse Employment and Economic Opportunities, Open Enrollment Flexibility, Child Abuse Identification and Reporting, Concurrent Juvenile Jurisdiction, Military Access to Quality Family childcare, Defining Armed Forces in State Policy, Military Community Representation on State Boards and Councils, State Response to Military Interpersonal Violence and State Report for Military Families with Special Education Needs. September 2021 Joining Forces Report: Strengthening America's Military Families. "The families of our service members and veterans, caregivers and survivors...may not wear a uniform...but they sacrifice for us all. They give their best to the United States, and we owe them nothing but our best in return." September 2022 DOD Memo: Taking care of our Military Families. "The Department of Defense has a sacred obligation to take care of our service members and families. The Defense-State Liaison Office provides state policymakers with expert insight on issues affecting military families and their quality of life. This is part of the Defense Department's efforts to identify and address the most pressing needs of service members and military families. One thing that we can all do is to support our service members by supporting

the DOD state policy priorities that impact the military community – so we can all work together to help advance initiatives. 70% of veterans consider suicide.

There is a website called: Military State Policy Source Website. The website complements support provided by regional liaisons by: Providing policy priority information and examples of best practice legislation, offering insight about how state policy impacts military families, tracking legislation on priorities across states, connecting to official Defense Department data and remaining mobile friendly and up to date. Go to: StatePolicy.MilitaryOneSource.mil Michelle Richart, Midwest Regional Liaison, serves CO, IA, KS, NE, ND, and SD.

The American Legion brought to the floor a discussion regarding making the Gold Star Family a Federal Holiday.

Gerald Brinkman – Border Patrol. In 1924 the border started US Border Patrol. Need to have consequences, it takes 4 times before US Assistant Attorney prosecution will prosecute. Asylum seekers must have fear of danger to become an asylum seeker. There are no agents online for backup. Example: 41 miles x 40 miles = 2 agents at Douglas County. It costs \$8,000 for Guatemalans to cross border to Cartell. The real threat is military age males crossing borders. The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary need to put a push on Washington for reform on legislation. Border Patrol –Between Obama, Trump, and Biden have shown massive differences on border patrol with each administration.

National Guard Counter Drug Program – Colonel Matthew Coates, National Counterdrug Advisory Council. The top U.S. Drug Threat is Fentanyl. Fentanyl Facts: Habitual cocaine, meth, and heroin drug addicts are overdosing on fentanyl. Why? Potent synthetic opioid drug: small dose is lethal, highly addictive, and higher rate of abuse, 100 times more potent than morphine and 50 times than heroin, easily manufactured and inexpensive to produce, production is not limited by geography (manufactured anywhere), frequently masked and mixed to mimic pharmaceutical drugs. The cost = \$800 to produce 415,000 Fentanyl pills, street value = approx. \$1.2 million. Fentanyl volume of a sugar packet correlates to 1700 lethal doses. Since 2016, more people have died from fentanyl overdoses than prescription opioids. Counterdrug Mission & Lines of Effort: Prevention – Drug Demand Reduction Outreach, DEA Takeback, Community Based Organization Support. Interdiction Support – Criminal Analyst, Investigative Case Support, Linguist, Reconnaissance Observation. Training – National Guard Counterdrug Schools Impact: In 2022 total value seized \$17.2B, ROI = \$88 for every \$1 spent on CDP. 931 Supported Law Enforcement Agencies = FY2022 Seizures Supported \$205.2M in illicit U.S. Currency, \$74.5M in Property, 95,446 kg of Marijuana (< 550,000 kg FY21), 139,620 kg of Cocaine, 111,823 kg of Methamphetamines, 2,867 kg of Heroin, 28,717 kg of Synthetic Opioids equals \$17.2B (Estimate Value*). National Guard Counterdrug Schools offered 436 courses, and 1,386 course illustrations. 9,918 Law Enforcement Officers, 58,782 Resident Students. 9,823 Distance Learning Students and 68,605 Total Trained. 625 DDRO Organizations Supported and 2,769 Counterdrug Missions.

Director of Defense State DSLO Liaison, Geraldine Valentino-Smith, Department of Defense – takes care of our Servicemembers and their families. DSLO works with State Policy – helps with quality of life for servicemembers.

Later in the day we attended the Commanders Call. Much information was shared by our National Commander and the bills that we would be visiting with our Senators about. The young people who received the American Legion Samsung Scholarships were introduced. Millions in college assistance is given through the American Legion Samsung Scholarships.