

Media & Communications Commission Meeting

Galt House, Stopher, Third Floor, East Tower

Saturday, August 29, 2026, 9 a.m.

Chairman Holly Lewis (OH) - Call to Order and Salute to Colors at 9 a.m.

Member Michael Kerr (OK) - Invocation

Member Janice Somers (CA) - POW/MIA Ceremony

Member Erica Deschamps (NY) - Pledge of Allegiance

Director of Media & Communications Henry Howard led roll call.

Those present:

Commission: Rodger Bennett (IL), Dan Brown (ND), John Buckwalter (MO), Albert Coughlin (IL), Jeffrey DeClerck (CT), Kim Endres (DE), Thomas Fernlund (MN), David Hall (WV), Frank Hall (PA), Gregory Jackson (CO), Barbara Johnson (AR), Milton Lashus (MA), Edward Lewis (FL), Holly Lewis (OH), Michael Lopez (NY), Mac McKinney (SC), Shannon Rasmussen (TN), Gary Schacher (NY), Julie Schnitzler (NE)

NEC Liaison Committee: Terry Schow (UT)

Council: Kimberly Ann Beebe (FL), James Bennett (CA), Bruce Carlson (CT), Erica Deschamps (NY), Anthony Gladden (NJ), Curis Goudy (IA), Michael Graichen (RI), Michael Kerr (OK), Jean Launsby (TN), James May (IN), Mattie McIntyre (NY), Daniel Meyer (IN), Ron Patterson (IN), Morris Sadicario (WI), Thomasena Sanderlin (GA), Janice Somers (CA), Robert Taylor (CA), Celia Torres (TX), Jacob Volk (ND), Arnold Whatley (OH), Andrew Williams (NY), Robert Zimbelman (IL)

Other guests who identified: Michael Hjelmstad (CA), NEC Liaison Andres Jaime Jr. (AZ), Robert Russell (GA), Chet Faith (WI), Russell Stafford (WY), Renee Ohler (OR), Ronald Arrington (IN), NEC Liaison Don Weber (OR), Jerry Allhands (MS), Rich Sambuchino (PA), Aleta Chambers (NC), George Duncan, Jr. (LA)

Chair Holly Lewis gave opening remarks.

She told those gathered that she planned to make meetings more collaborative than in the past. She wants them to share what is working. One of the biggest challenges is to get info from departments down to posts.

Acknowledged former Director Jeff Stoffer who moved to the new role with the Legion.

Went through a round up of what is to come

She briefly spoke about TCAVA.

- The house is expected to return Monday with a vote expected next week.
- Visit legion.org/tcava if you or anyone has questions
- Participate in the Legion's grassroots action center campaign legion.org to advocacy.

Director Henry Howard gave his operations report. He first touched on staff changes:

- Long-time director Jeff Stoffer moved into a new role as assistant to the national adjutant. He will be working remotely from Washington state as he cares for his mother.
- Long-time advertising manager Diane Andretti moved to the Office of Fund Development. That office has a new director, Madison Kelleher.

He encouraged all to attend Media Training Workshop here at convention on Monday from 8:30 a.m. to noon. A variety of topics will be covered, including AI, website redesign, magazine prototype.

He spoke briefly about the items included in the commission packets.

- He encouraged everyone to use the member-submitted content site, Legiontown. Encourage posts to submit their stories there as editors do regularly look for stories on Legiontown. www.legiontown.org.
Flyer is attached to this email.
- He also went over another handout on how to create your own membership impact report. This is available on the website here: <https://www.legion.org/member-services/resources/post-impact-reports>

He spent time speaking about the new magazine and showed the magazine prototype, which is a more compact version of the magazine.

This was brought on by leadership asking us to cut magazine costs. We didn't want to cut the magazine like many organizations have done or reduce the frequency. With a print product, each member gets this touch point every month. This will start with the February 2027 issue.

By making this change:

- Saving \$2 million/year with this more compact size.

- Puts the magazine in a different mailing class with the USPS. This postal class is more immune to postal hikes.
- This allows additional pages and new features.
- Nothing is missing. Everything currently in the magazine is staying, plus a more dynamic digital version.

How can you help?

- Stop by the booth in the exhibit hall.
- Ask questions
- Help us spread the word.
- For advertising purposes, we need some voices to add testimonials. Please consider doing this.
- Give us feedback. This is your magazine. We have many more months to refine this.

We have some back-end set up to do before the transition.

- Shorthand – a company that will do the technical set up.
- Will continue advertising sales with James G. Elliott Company

Henry gave a USA 250 Challenge wrap up.

- Yearlong challenge with 3,140 participants.
- Raised \$131,000 for the Veteran & Children's Foundation
 - Our own council member, Indiana Past Dept. Commander Ron Patterson, raised around \$22,000.
- Other benefits to the challenge:
 - We received external media hits, for example Mitchell Keil with their walk through MA historical sites.
 - End celebration at the Mid-Ohio race – News Nation interview with Mandatory Fun Day.
 - Biggest impact on those who went through the challenge. One participant, example: As a result of the challenge, he and wife now walk 3 miles/day; weight loss

Henry also spoke about Buddy Checks. They began in 2019, under National Commander Brett Reistad. Since then, posts have done 2.1 million Buddy Checks. VA Buddy Check week is in late September.

We have a variety of resources for Buddy Checks including a tool kit, scripts and more. That can all be found here; <https://www.legion.org/advocacy/be-the-one/buddy-check>

Media & Communications is helping to support the Office of Fund Development's Humvee sweepstakes which runs through December 19.

- SAL member donated a Humvee.
- Entries can be purchased here:
<https://fundraise.givesmart.com/form/3gJzkg?vid=1s4pij>

Chair Holly Lewis asked members for examples of Buddy checks. It's a good way for people who can't get out of the house to still serve – by being able to make calls. Some examples include.

- JD Bennett, California: 28 checks per week.
- Jeff DeClerck talked about what not to do. Don't make it a membership call; Make it about what they need; checking on wellbeing of a veteran.
- Morris Sadicario – 3rd Monday of the month. People will not talk to their families, but will talk to you.
Hard to measure success; Gauge success by them talking.
Perfect opportunity to share stories.
- Holly gave her own example from Ohio- created a form – BTO calls first of the month. They can tell the stories. Took a break during their Ohio membership meeting – district commanders - called WWII/Korea vets.
- Kim Endres gave a personal example. A Legionnaire called to check on her, as a caregiver, after her husband was in the hospital.
- It could save a life.
Michael Kerr, OK, said they are working with National Guard – OK emphasis "You Matter." Training others outside of the Legion.

She asked about what metrics can be used for Buddy Checks. Some examples given were:

- Retention numbers; before and after Buddy check numbers;
- Length of phone calls; time spent on the phone.
- Excel sheets to track visits

Holly Lewis gave a presentation on civility in social media. Her slides are attached to this email. She wanted to include this in today's meeting because she felt extremely uncomfortable with what she was reading on social media and didn't know what to do.

Example of misinformation being spread about the Humvee being purchased. Facts are that the Humvee was donated.

Key takeaways:

- Civility doesn't mean being nice. Nice is different than being kind.
- Address issues without attacking the person.
- Can be direct without being disrespectful.
- Not about avoiding conflict. Conflict is healthy.
- This is about handling conflict well.

The urge to respond is not the same as the reason to respond.

- Think about who is seeing your comment, others than just the commenter.
- Different situations require different responses.
- What is behind different comments.

Holly recommended a free LinkedIn learning course by Fred Kofman called "Managing conflict."

What are you trying to accomplish?

- Don't start writing until you understand what you're trying to accomplish.
- Slow your process down.
- Choose the right kind of response. She gave an example of her post's fish fry disaster and how she responded to those comments.

She encouraged the use AI to help craft a response, by asking, "Help me be civil."

Good things to remember:

- Pause – Identify – Acknowledge – Advance
- Algorithms in social media like drama, likes, shares, views
- Civility doesn't require unlimited access.

Ask yourself:

- What is really happening?
- What am I trying to accomplish?
- Am I the right person to respond?

- Will my response help or add more heat

Responses:

- Respond with purpose
- Response should demonstrate judgement, disciple and leadership.
- PAUSE and get yourself under control before you respond.

She asked commission and council members for their own examples of how to respond.

Holly also brought up the idea of having additional virtual meetings for the commission, noting that departments have limited numbers of call ins so many members of the council and commission don't get to come.

Input from members:

- Keep topics very focused; staff member would present.
- Training component for each.
- Idea to have meetings quarterly via Teams or Riverside.
- Will send out a poll to gather consensus on a day/time.
- Agenda needs to be very clear about what will be covered.

Holly gave brief closing remarks that included going to the Grassroots Action Center: <https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/home> and also encourage people to attend the Media Training workshop on Monday.

Salute to colors and adjournment.