

2026 Media & Communications Commission Mtg.
Spring Meetings
May 4, 2026, 8:30 a.m.

Chairman Holly Lewis (OH) - Call to Order & Salute to Colors at 8:30 a.m.

Jeffrey DeClerck (CT)- Invocation

Edward Lewis (FL) POW/MIA Ceremony

David Hall (WV) Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Holly Lewis gave her opening remarks and offered a word of thanks to past chairman Dave Wallace.

She asked for a moment of silence for the three commission members moved to post everlasting: Frank Ward (SC), Michael Moses (KY) and David Sharber (IN).

She introduced the news of changes to the magazine size in order to keep a monthly magazine. Beginning with the February 2027 issue, the magazine size will be smaller which will be a cost savings of \$2 million per year.

Director Jeff Stoffer (SAL-MT) – Role call

Those present:

Commission: Ronald Arrington (IN), Rodger Bennett (IL), John Buckwalter (MO), Jeffrey DeClerck (CT), George Duncan Jr. (LA), Thomas Fernlund (MN), Travise Flisrand (SD), David Hall (WV), Frank Hall (PA), Gregory Jackson (CO), Barbara Johnson (AR), Patrick Keefe (KY), Edward Lewis (FL), Holly Lewis (OH), Michael Lopez (NY), Shannon Rasmussen (TN), Gary Schacher (NY), Melvin Weaver (GA)

Liaison Committee: Terry Schow (UT)

Council: Theodore Balbierz (NY), Kimberly Beebe (FL), Lucky Gallego Sr (ID), Anthony LaMonte Gladden (NJ), Michael Graichen (RI), **Michael Kerr (OK)**, Jean Launsby (TN), Daniel Meyer (IN), Morris Sadicario (WI), Janice Somers (CA), Eric Stallings (OR), Robert Taylor (CA), Celia Torres (TX), Arnold Whatley (OH)

National Commander Dan Wiley stopped in and spoke to the commission. He called on the commission to raise funds for the USA 250 Challenge which goes to VCF. Money is returned to veterans through things like Veteran Service Officers

In 2025 – Veteran Service Officers helped return 29.5 billion to veterans.
Financial stability goes to combat veteran suicide.

Ryan Elliott, COO, and Jim Elliott, President, James G. Elliott Company gave an advertising report.

Overview of the print environment.

- Cost of postage continues to increase.
- More budgets shift towards digital.
- Some movement back to print. Many like the physical feel of something in the hand.

Revenue update for the year 2025

- 2.2 million, which is right on goal, 2% down, but pretty close.
- Seeing a good rebound, especially on print product.
- Print revenue is up 2%.
- Making about \$500 more per page.
- Surprisingly, we're a little behind on digital revenue. This should be made up in the rest of 2026.

Discussion on size reduction of the magazine.

- James G. Elliott Company has experience with magazines of different sizes.
- Easier to hold a smaller magazine, which will be thicker and is a better user experience.
- Staff can pull off this change, and change course, if needed
- M&C staff has a plan to roll out the changes.
- More environmentally friendly, can be part of the story.
- Plenty of time to make the change for February 2027 issue.

Showed example of magazines of various sizes.

Dwayne Greenplate, Sheridan gave a printing and mailing report.

He started by reiterating that print is a great and relevant communication tool. They have seen the resurgence of print.

He first outlined new items at Sheridan:

- The company had a few acquisitions.
 - Added WLX, logistics company.

- Added Teldon, a print production company.
- Sheridan won a sustainability award in April.
- Beta testing a new customer portal.
- In process of adding quality teams to plants.

Postage update:

- On July 12, 2026, USPS will have a large postage increase. Board of directors has until end of month to approve.
- They don't just arbitrarily raise rates.
- As volume goes down, they're allowed to add that to the rates.
- Periodicals have an extra increase because they have not been making money.
- Considerable postage increases in the past and will continue to occur.
- Postage is the biggest line item.

USPS knows periodical postage is hard to understand for customers.

- They're going to change this in the future and make it easier.
- Continue to offer mandated rates for non profits.

Full year 2025 financials for USPS:

- \$80 billion in sales
- 108 billion pieces of mail
- Loss of almost \$9 million. No profit since 2006.

Start of 2026:

- \$1.3 billion loss in first quarter of 2026
- Postmaster General said in the next 1 to 2 years, he expects to run out of cash.
- Approval for money away from retirees to the operating fund.

What to expect going forward:

- Postmaster General is petitioning congress to act.
- Continued lobbying for bipartisan independent national postal service
- Expect some service slow downs and continued postage increases.

What to do to help with costs.

- Co-mail – Legion is already doing this.

- Smaller project size. Smaller magazine will go be under a different classification which will change our cost considerably.

Greg Hull, Lindenmeyr Central, gave a paper market update.

Greg gave an encouraging word about the magazine size change.

- He has been involved in many size reductions and they've all gone successfully.
- Readers will appreciate a new experience.

The war in Iran has had a minimal impact so far.

- Paper is impacted by transportation costs.
- From a supply standpoint, we should be happy with where the magazine is.

European market is a mess. US has been more diligent in rationalizing demand.

Tariffs

- The American Legion is not subject to any tariffs so we can feel good about the magazine.
- Temporary tariffs set at lower levels. Section 122 has to end up in congress.

Demand and data trends

- Coated paper (cover) – pretty steady over the last three years.

Break

Director Jeff Stoffer gave an operations report.

- He emphasized that it is a year of transition for the media & communications division.
- Working proactively as a division to get in front of the economic situation, particularly in print media.

He gave an overview of some of the ongoing projects.

- #1 priority for national organization is to reduce veteran suicide, which is done through the Be the One mission. We know that our members are acting on Be The One.
 - 20,000 have done the training
 - Be The One has moved officially VA&R

- Spoke briefly on the 250th anniversary of the nation. Jeff is on task force led by PNCs Seehafer/Rowan.
 - Resolution came through the committee. Singled out Utah for its work on the 250th.
 - Done best through our posts. Posts are where we make the biggest impact.
 - Sojourn 250 – Riders will be escorting US flag in Pittsburgh on the morning of the 4th of July, 250 riders escort to D.C.
 - Roosevelt Museum opening July 4, 2026 in North Dakota – National commander and Dept. of ND commander will attend.

- Social media transition to marketing, new/old employee – Reggie Mathis.

- Development stages for The American Legion magazine – prototypes. Excited about his magazine with digital, robust expansion on what is in print. Better digital experience and honestly a better print experience.
 - Will save a least \$2 million per year in postage.
 - 3 out of 4 months so far we beat budget in advertising sales.
 - Our audience responds to our stories and advertising.

- Division continues to work with the Office of Fund Development. Jeff has been mentoring Jane Reed following the passing of Director Doug Stafford.

- Highlighted the Legion’s role in telling the story of Royce Williams, who recently received the Medal of Honor at age 100. TAL was first national publication to tell his story in 2017.

- Tony Heath developed a well-received convention app. He was given unplanned and urgent mission – to develop app for spring, fall, Wash conf. – National Meetings app.

- Jeff’s announced that he would be retiring as the director of media & communications. He likely will continue to assist the Legion in a smaller role.

Deputy Director Henry Howard gave an update on the strategic plan.

- The division meets at the beginning of the year, assign teams and then again in the summer to touch base.
 - This year we did it differently and gave items labels of “tier 1” and “tier 2” priorities.

- Tier 1 includes items such as the magazine transition, USA 250, advertising, Be The One, Tango Alpha Lima
- Tier 2 are smaller priority items.

He touched on several of the tier 1 priorities.

- Magazine transition
 - Trimmed-down size
 - Digital component
 - A big win was being able to still deliver a magazine to every legionnaire every month.
 - Prototypes are available for viewing in our building on 5/5/26. These are not to be shared, early stages.
 - Goal is at convention have a print prototype.

- USA 250 Challenge
 - Two months from today is the 4th of July.
 - Approximately 3,000 participants in the challenge.
 - Highlighted Massachusetts post – 250 mile walk going through historical place concluding in their post.

Played Commander Wiley's fundraising PSA – [watch here](#).

Took a collection for the challenge and collected \$703 at the meeting.

Shout out to Ron Patterson, Dept of Indiana commander and former council member who is leading the way in fundraising.

- Advertising/budget
 - Increases in print revenue
 - Podcast savings
 - Podcast 2/month
 - editing in house
 - Newsletter savings
 - cull the newsletter email list. Even bad email addresses cost us money

He highlighted a couple of tier 2 priorities:

- PNC Perspectives
- TAL Family media

Next steps for the strategic plan:

- Summer assessment
- Measuring success

He also noted that in the magazine transition, members can opt into digital only and can opt out of print. MyLegion is the place to do this.

More information can be found [here](#).

Advertising Manager Diane Andretti gave a report on new advertising business.

- Advertising has been very good for the first four months.
- Magazine advertising is leading the way
- \$381,000 in new business
- Working on new business while maintaining old business, as well.
- Highlighted Kimberly Clark's advertising

Jeff Stoffer spoke more in depth on his involvement in the America 250 ad hoc committee.

Key points:

- They were tasked with this without any budget, which has been a challenge.
- American Legion Riders will participate in Sojourn 250 on 7/4 from Pittsburgh to DC
 - 148 riders out of 250 already committed. Call to get more.
 - Will arrive at Nationals Park for a game of the Nationals vs. Pirates.
 - Will continue through DC for delivery of the flag at the Capitol building.
- Part of the anniversary will include being on hand at the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library dedication on July 4.
- The magazine continues to cover the 250th birthday in each issue. Big focus in July's issue. Also covered the service branch anniversaries during this past year.
- [America Waves](#) – America 250 initiative. Legion has a way to succeed in helping coordinate flag waving across the country.
- The June magazine will have a package on the flag.
- Looking for a major partner to help send flag education kits to every school in America.

Jason Reed spoke about e-newsletters and some of the challenges.

- Undeliverable emails hurt reputation among Google, Yahoo, Outlook.
- In 2026, 25 million emails have already been sent.
 - Inactives – 18 million
 - Bounces – not delivered
 - Blocks – 375,000 blocked before it gets to sender. Comcast – blocks over 50% of our emails.
- These also lower our performance
 - Open rate – 28%, but industry benchmark has moved up to 40-45%.
 - Click through now 4.2%, industry 2.6%.
- Working to reduce the number who don't visit.
 - Removed inactives, which is considered those who haven't opened in six months or clicked in one year.
 - Doing this increases numbers and saves money by removing those.
- Implementing AI Personal Delivery timeline which determines the ideal moment to deliver to each individual subscriber.
 - Helps determine when they're most likely to open.
 - Will improve the return on our investment.

Henry Howard spoke on our podcast, Tango Alpha Lima.

- Reduced frequency – allows us to get higher quality of guest.
- editing taken over by staff.
- What's next:
 - Military influencer conference attendance this year. Aim to target younger veterans, hope to bring into the legion through the podcast.
 - Army/Navy game sponsorship.
 - Day before game on media row – we get to bring people to external media outlets.
 - Our podcast team is there.

Cameran Richardson went over the recommended winners for the annual Media & Communications awards.

- There were 127 submissions among the six categories.
- Winners can be found [here](#).

- It was suggested that one of the two larger awards, the innovation award be named for longtime commission member, Frank Ward. A simple vote was taken and passed.

John Raughter presented the two winners for this year’s Fourth Estate awards in broadcast and print.

- Broadcast –KXAN, Austin, TX. In a multi-part series (“Preventing Disaster”) investigative reporter Josh Hinkle examined the vulnerabilities of hospitals to emergency room crashes by motor vehicles, finding that more than 580 instances have occurred at 157 medical-related sites resulting in more than 20 deaths since 2014.
- Print– The Bucks County Courier Times (Levittown, Pa.). Across the nation, hundreds of decedents are kept in county morgues for months or years unclaimed, even though in many cases their identities are known. Thanks to the reporting of the Courier Times reporter Jo Ciavaglia, at least 240 sets of remains have been claimed and given final resting places as of December 2025.

He encouraged members to be on the lookout in their local news for stories that have a positive community impact. Urge that news outlet to submit an entry.

Chair Holly Lewis called for a vote. Rodger Bennett (IL) made a motion to approve the Fourth Estate award winners. Second by Jeffrey DeClerck (CT), all in favor, motion carried.

Cameran Richardson and **Rebecca Shindel (marketing)** presented plans for promotion of the flag.

Rebecca Shindel spoke about updates to the flag pages on legion.org. She touched on how the Marketing, Americanism and M&C Divisions are working together.

- Flag code is the third most-searched phrase on the website.
- The website gives us opportunities to get people to flag pages and then provide an introduction to the Legion.

Cameran Richardson relayed to members some of the resources that are available.

- A flag spread will be in the June issue of the magazine.
- Promos to flag resources.
- New flag video coming out.
- More resources will come as they’re updated.

Jeff Stoffer presented four manuscripts recommended for write offs totaling \$4,200 and three companies for advertising write offs totaling \$42,011.86.

Chair Holly Lewis called for a vote. Jeffrey DeClerck (CT) made a motion to approve the write offs. Second by Gregory Jackson (CO), all in favor, motion carried.

IT Director Dave Sutton spoke on artificial intelligence and urged caution.

- You are responsible. It's a human augmentation. You have to be smart about how you use it. Many different uses for AI, improve speed, etc. but be cautious.
- Make sure you read your output.
- He created app for marketing, 100% generated by AI, 100% had to be modified by a human.
- "Boundaries" is the most important word.
- AI is not magic, but when used properly it is terrific.
- Examples include Chat GTP, copilot, Gemini.
 - Legion copilot is bound by our Legion rules.
- Member examples from discussion:
 - Used AI to analyze a bill in Utah. That was over 100 pages. Saves time.
 - Minutes – uses Plaud – records and transcribes.
 - Sutton said Plaud (and others) are not allowed at National HQ, because of not knowing where information will go.
 - Summary features through copilot as a summary/minutes of that.
 - Question re: emblem/brand mark with AI.

Holly Soria recommended that a person first generates an image and then put the emblem on it.

Chair Holly Lewis issued three calls to action:

- Share meeting minutes with depts/districts. It is our duty as part of this commission to get this information out.
- Comment, share, like any National Headquarters social media. Try to do this once a week. These include LinkedIn YouTube, Facebook, X, Instagram. Algorithms matter.
- Click on and read newsletters. Also, whitelist your Legion emails.

Salute to colors and adjournment.

Holly Lewis paid tribute to Director Jeff Stoffer on his upcoming retirement/transition to a new role. Hotel staff, Media & Communications staff, and vendors wheeled in a cake for Jeff.