

Pre-NEC Report: National Security Commission
August 26, 2023
Charlotte, NC
Matthew Shuman, Arizona, Chairman

On Saturday, August 26th, the National Security Commission convened in the Charlotte Convention Center Room 207 Sections A-D. National Security Commission Chairman Matthew Shuman (AZ) opened the meeting by recognizing Past National Commanders, Clarence E. Hill (FL) and Charles E. Schmidt (OR). The National Security Commission was honored by their attendance and very appreciative of their participation in the National Security session.

The National Security meeting was honored by a visit from Rebekah Edmondson from the PenFed Foundation who is the Program Manager for the Foundation's Afghan Rescue and Resettlement Program. The program was founded in November 2021 to assist refugees who are proven to have supported our country's values in exemplary ways. Joined by Ms. Edmondson was Mahnaz Akbari, who served as the Commander of the Afghan Female Tactical Platoon.

Chairman Shuman provided remarks on the numerous national security threats facing the U.S., including Russia, China, terrorism, and cybercrime. Domestic polarization and immigration also challenge national security. The American Legion's new BASE program will evaluate military quality of life issues. The remarks mourned the 2-year anniversary of the tragic Abbey Gate attack in Afghanistan and urged protecting Afghan refugees and allies still in danger and legal limbo. He warned a government shutdown could harm servicemembers and said Congress should repeal outdated war authorizations like the 2002 Iraq AUMF. With military recruiting struggles, the Legion is working with the DoD and urging members to aid local recruiters. In dangerous times, the Legion must act responsibly to support peace through military strength, remembering soldiers pray for peace, he concluded.

The meeting comprised of 4 guest presentations. The first Speaker, Ms. Fern Sumpter Winbush, Principal Deputy Director at the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), shared remarks and a presentation about the mission of DPAA in repatriating the 81,000+ servicemembers still missing from our nation's conflicts. She stated that we are promise keepers for those who came before us. The causality numbers from our conflicts as of today are:

- ❖ 72,192 from WWII
- ❖ 7,492 from Korean War
- ❖ 1,578 Vietnam War
- ❖ 126 from Cold War
- ❖ 6 from Iraq and other conflicts

Of the 81,000+ missing, about 38,000 that can be recovered. The DPAA mission is widely recognized as a humanitarian effort with support from over 40+ countries. Not only does DPAA repatriate US servicemembers, but they have also worked with the South Korean government to assist them with identifying Korean servicemembers. As a part of her presentation, Ms. Winbush shared a short video of the ocean exploration efforts by a non-profit organization who assists DPAA with submerged sites that can help identify pieces of military equipment that have been under water. One recently identified servicemember included a Medal of Honor recipient, Lt Col Addison Baker, U.S. Army Air Force, who was posthumously awarded for his bravery in

destroying an oil field and later succumbing to a plane crash during that mission. His remains were buried in an unknown grave which were identified by DPAA. Earlier this year, DPAA identified Corporal Story, U.S. Army, who at 19 years old was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. During the Korean War in 1950, his unit held a defensive position when a numerically superior enemy force assaulted his positions. Corporal Story displayed bravery in repelling several enemy attacks. Wounded, he chose to remain behind and cover the withdrawal of his comrades.

The second speaker Mr. Keith Webster, President of the Defense & Aerospace Council and President of the Federal Acquisition Council from the US Chamber of Commerce spoke about the challenges facing the Defense Industrial Base (DIB). Mr. Webster opened his remarks to discuss the status of the DIB which included the consolidation of the defense companies and supply chain issues. For example, the company who provides the chemicals needed to make flight equipment clothing flame retardant has stated their supply is running out and does not have a way to resupply those chemicals. Another example, a company who owns property in the US still cannot get the permits required to mine in the United States.

The recent invasion of Ukraine has begun to deplete US stockpiles of weapons which has changed the way the US has begun to look at how best to supply our own military. He stated the Biden Administration is working closely with US allies to accelerate munitions stockpile production to include AI, and hypersonic beyond Mach 4. He also stated that Congress needs to pass legislative reform to allow AUKUS to succeed and advance the opportunities for small businesses to enter the market. On the topic of workforce development, Mr. Webster suggested the government work to sponsor students who want to attend trade schools in the United States and allow employers to compete for federal grants for apprenticeships and internships.

Mr. Webster explained that munitions for Ukraine comes from two budgets: Title 10 for weapons supplies to Ukraine and the State Department Title 22 (Foreign Military Sales) that includes non-lethal aid and humanitarian programs. He stated there is a degradation of US readiness, but if Russia comes over the Ukrainian border, that will trigger article IV of the NATO treaty and will require the US to become involved in the war.

Lastly, Mr. Webster stated that next year is a big risk for a government shutdown, and that there is a risk for a Continuing Resolution (CR) this year. He noted that the Pentagon cannot start a new program under a CR and that they can only continue existing programs. With a CR being in place for 6 months, he stated the US loses that time for progress involving acquisition and investments. Timely passage of defense appropriations is the best thing Congress can do.

--Break for Lunch--

After our lunch break, the National Security Commission meeting had a visit from our National Commander, Vincent "Jim" Troiola where he presented a commander coin to each of the panelists for the military quality of life panel.

In the afternoon, the National Security Division hosted a military Quality-of-Life Panel with each service senior enlisted leader. This included the Moderator, Mr. Jason Vanderhaden, 13th Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard and the following panelists: The 20th Sergeant Major of the

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Marine Corps (SMMC) Carlos Ruiz, the 19th Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force JoAnne Bass, the Senior Enlisted Advisor (SEA) to the Vice Chief of Naval Operations Command Master Chief Petty Officer (SS/IW) Matthew Harris, Senior Enlisted Advisor (SEA) to the Deputy Chief of Staff Headquarters G-9, Department of the Army, Sergeant Major Michael Perry, and the Senior Enlisted Advisor (SEA) to the Chief of the National Guard Bureau Tony Whitehead. The discussion started with brief opening remarks from each service enlisted chief.

Retired Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Jason Vanderhaden asked the first question to the panel, how can the veteran community that are here today help improve the quality of life for your people?

SEA Whitehead shared that no one tells a story better than we do on what it means to serve in the military. SMMC shared that how you communicate about your service, how you tell your story, is more important than what you see on tv or in the news. CMSAF said that advocating on the hill for healthcare, pay and compensation, and education, are all important because veterans can say it in a stronger way than those still serving. She also stated that servicemembers have not had a targeted pay raise since 2008 and that as the most educated and talented force in history, troops must be appropriately compensated.

The panelists then took 15+ questions from the audience on various quality of life topics to include, suicide prevention efforts, timely mental health care appointments, childcare, military pay and compensation, appropriations spending for military construction, TRICARE, paying the Coast Guard during government shutdowns, and lastly, how passing a continuing resolution in lieu of passing a budget has 2nd and 3rd effects on active duty and reserve forces.

The last question asked by the National Security Commission was the esprit de corps of the armed forces today. CMDMC Harris stated that the services are standing on the shoulders of those in the audience today because of veteran advocacy for servicemembers. He also stated the need for the services to bring people in because they will not be able to retain our way out of a decline in military participation. Lastly, Command Master Chief Harris said that it upsets him to hear people say they do not want to join because they will get the same salary as someone who works at Starbucks, when joining the military could cost them life or limb. Sergeant Major Perry also pledged the Army's support for military quality of life, and stated the Army has committed 10 billion dollars to barracks renovations and construction over the course of 5 years.

The last speaker of the day was Dr. Shelley Rigger of Davidson College who gave remarks about China and Taiwan. She started off her remarks by saying that there have been a series of voices making predictions about when the Taiwan straight is going to erupt and their reasoning behind them. She gave a short history of Taiwanese-U.S. relations since 1945 and concluded that diplomatic relations have degraded since then. Because of that, more experts are talking about a potential war with China and the United States, should China choose to invade Taiwan.

The National Security Commission thanks National Commander Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola, our National Executive Liaison Committee and the National Executive Committee for their support throughout the year and we will continue to work diligently to provide The American Legion with timely information and a focused national security policy and a viable foreign policy.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "M. Shuman", is written above a horizontal line.

Matthew Shuman
National Security Commission Chairman
Department of Arizona