

VFW at the Starting Gate for the 125th National Convention

Medal of Honor Recipient David Bellavia joins other distinguished speakers for the weeklong event

Jul 25, 2024

LOUISVILLE — Iraq War Medal of Honor recipient, author and radio talk show host David Bellavia, Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear, and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough are just a few who will deliver remarks to the more than 10,000 members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and its Auxiliary during the 125th VFW National Convention as it convenes this Saturday through Aug. 1 at the Kentucky International Convention Center in Louisville, Kentucky.

“This has been a banner year for the VFW, and I can think of no better place to cross the finish line than in Louisville,” said VFW National Commander Duane Sarmiento. “I’m excited for the program we have in store for the comrades coming to town, especially with so many prominent guest speakers who will address our delegates during the week.”

This will be the first time David Bellavia will address a VFW National Convention. Bellavia, who received the [Medal of Honor](#) from President Donald J. Trump during a ceremony at the White House on June 25, 2019, is the only living recipient from the Iraq War. After leaving service in the U.S. Army, he went on to write two books about his experiences – House to House: An Epic Memoir of War and Remember the Ramrods: An Army Brotherhood in War and Peace. Along with public speaking engagements, Bellavia hosts the talk radio show and podcast “[The David Bellavia Show](#)” on WBEN in Buffalo, New York, and streaming through Audacy.

Other distinguished speakers during the convention include Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough; Sen. Rand Paul R-Ky.; Taiwanese Veterans Affairs Council Deputy Minister Wu, Chih-Yang; Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) Director Kelly McKeague; Twisted X CEO Prasad Reddy; USAA Senior Vice President Major General (Ret.) John Richardson IV and Student Veterans of America National President & CEO Jared Lyon. Other speakers such as VA Under Secretary for Benefits Joshua Jacobs and

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VFW National Ambassador SEAC (Ret.) John Wayne Troxell will share their thoughts during special presentations at larger committee meetings over the weekend.

The 10,000 VFW and VFW Auxiliary delegates attending represent the organizations' total combined membership of more than 1.4 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.

"Last summer, I bet on the VFW to meet the challenge of impacting veterans lives everywhere," said Sarmiento. "From the \$13 billion our service officers helped recoup for veterans, to the more than 500 communities worldwide we contributed to during our Day of Service, to the legislation we advocated for across the country and on Capitol Hill over the past 365 days, I feel like we made it to the winner's circle."

The convention is expected to generate \$14.2 million in revenue for Louisville.

During the business sessions of the convention, delegates will elect and install the national-level chair officers, to include a new VFW national commander, Al Lipphardt, of North Fulton, Georgia, as well as recognize prominent individuals and organizations for their support of the veteran and military communities.

Receiving VFW national awards Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday are:

VFW Commander-in-Chief's Gold Medal of Merit

- [Carla Martinez](#), 2023 – 2024 National President of the VFW Auxiliary
- [U.S. Senator Tom Carper](#), (D-Delaware)
- [Hon. Anthony Principi](#), former Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and retired VFW Foundation board member
- [Leo Holt](#), Co-Owner, [Holt Logistics](#)
- [Brian Daly](#), Executive Director, [Guy Fieri Foundation](#)

VFW Distinguished Service Awards

- Tim Borland, 2023 – 2024 VFW Commander-in-Chief
- Kevin Jones, Past VFW Adjutant General
- James "Gunny" Gregory, [Run for the Wall](#)

VFW Distinguished Citizenship Award

- Jared Allen, former NFL defensive end and founder, [Jared Allen's Homes for Wounded](#)

Warriors

VFW Distinguished Patriotic Award

- [Fawn Weaver](#), founder and CEO, [Uncle Nearest Premium Whiskey](#)

VFW Distinguished Educational Award

- Lora Vogt, Vice President of Education and Interpretation, [National WWI Museum and Memorial](#)

VFW Distinguished Historical Award

- Les Hines

VFW Distinguished Fraternal Award

- Carol Thomas

VFW John A. Biedrzycki Accredited Service Representatives of the Year Award

- Gerald “Jerry” Kayrouz, Department Service Officer, VFW Department of Kentucky

VFW National Member of the Year Award

- Sarah Lively, VFW Post 9675, Department of Nebraska

VFW National Teacher of the Year Awards

- Eugene Struzik III, Northwest Elementary School, Dodge City, Kansas
- Monica Galloway, Dwight D. Eisenhower Middle School, Laurel, Maryland
- Edward Graf, Somerset County Vocational & Technical High School, Bridgewater, New Jersey

VFW Voice of Democracy \$30,000 T.C. Selman Memorial Scholarship Award

- Sophia Lin, sponsored by VFW Post 3513, Scottsdale, Arizona

VFW National JROTC Cadet of the Year Award

- Aaliyah Jones

VFW National Employer of the Year Award

- Tyler Lauer, [Duncan Aviation](#)

The VFW National Convention will livestream its July 28 – Aug. 1 business sessions at [VFW.org/Convention](#), beginning with the Joint Memorial Service Sunday, July 28 at 8:30 a.m. EST. A full schedule of events can be accessed using the “VFW Events” app, available for download at both the Apple App and Google Play stores.

Only registered and credentialed media from bona fide news organizations will be approved to cover convention activities. [Click here to pre-register for media credentials](#).

In addition to business sessions, workshops and committee meetings, a free, four-day walk-in VA claims clinic and health fair are accessible to all veterans, service members and their families registered for the conference.

The 125th National Convention is proudly sponsored in part by [USAA](#) and [Wounded Warrior Project](#).