



Issued Monthly from State Headquarters in Watertown, SD

Up To Now!

www.sdlegion.org - 605-886-3604 - adjutant@sdlegion.org

C.P. Van Delist – Department Adjutant

No. 33698

January 9, 2025

🎂 Jan 11 Commander Hempel's Birthday! 🎂

Jan 10 DIST 4 Oratory Post 24, 617 S 15th St, Aberdeen 12:30pm
 Jan 10 DIST 8 Oratory Springfield Community Center 10am
 Jan 11 DIST 1 Oratory Countryside Church, Spearfish 2pm
 Jan 11 DIST 5 Oratory Castlewood Community Center 1pm
 Oratory Humboldt Community Center 1pm, storm date, Jan 18
 Jan 13 SD Legislative Session Opens

Jan 13 Commander's Town Hall 7pm, MS Teams

Jan 14 MEMBERSHIP TARGET DATE- MID-WINTER 80%
 Jan 14 SD Veterans Council Meeting, Pierre Post 8 2-5pm
 Jan 14 SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception 5:30-7:30pm
 Jan 17 DIST 6 Oratory Kimball American Legion Post, 1pm
 Jan 17 MyLegion Training, SF Post 15, 10am-3pm
 Jan 18 DIST 3 Oratory Faith Lutheran Living Center, Pierre
 Jan 19 MARTIN LUTHER KING JR DAY, Office Closed
 Jan 22 Monthly DEC Meeting, MS Teams 7pm
 Jan 26 Legion Day at the Capitol 1pm in the Capitol Rotunda
 Jan 26 Legion Legislative Reception, Pierre Post 8, 5:30pm
 Feb 1 MidWinter Go-Getter certification due to HQ
 Feb 11 MEMBERSHIP TARGET DATE- PRESIDENT DAY 85%
 Feb 16 PRESIDENT'S DAY, Office Closed
 Feb 18-21 Candidate for National Commander Jay Bowen visit SD
 Feb 19-22 MidWinter Conference
 Feb 23 Office Closed
 Mar 1 Eagle Scout of the Year applications due to HQ
 Mar 1-4 Washington Conference
 Mar 7 DIST 5 Meeting- Bruce Post 200, 11:30 meal, 1pm meeting
 Mar 8 DIST 4 Meeting- Redfield Post 92, Meeting 1pm, meal follow
 Mar 11 MEMBERSHIP TARGET- LEGION BIRTHDAY 90%
 Mar 14 DIST 6 Meeting- Arlington Post 42, 11:30 social, noon meal, 1pm meeting
 Mar 15 DIST 3 Meeting- Gregory Post 6, registration 11:30am, lunch 12:30pm, meeting 1pm
 Mar 26 Monthly DEC Meeting, MS Teams 7pm
 Mar 28 DIST 8 Meeting- Vermillion Post 1, Vermillion Main St Center, 10am
 Mar 28 DIST 7 Meeting- Sioux Falls Post 15, 3pm, or 15 min after the arrival of the Dept Officers
 Apr 3-5 EASTER HOLIDAY Office Closed
 Apr 8 MEMBERSHIP TARGET DATE- CHILDREN AND YOUTH 95%
 Apr 11 DIST 1 Meeting- Spearfish Post 164, 3102 E Fairgrounds Loop, Spearfish, Lunch 12pm Meeting at 1pm
Apr 12 DIST 2 Meeting- Rapid City Post 22,
Apr 14 Commander's Town Hall 7pm, MS Teams
 Apr 15 Tax Day ☺

COMMANDER'S TOWNHALL

Commander Hempel will be holding a virtual townhall on **January 13th** over video teleconference. You can log in over your computer, or smart device or even call in. this is your chance to discuss what is going on with the American Legion and find out from the top the answers to your questions. It is open to everyone. Log in information is:

[Click here to Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 225 775 090 784 Passcode: N2jZoD

By phone [1-872-239-6022](tel:18722396022), ID: 532 867 600#

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

Legion family,

It is hard to believe that it already the new year. Not sure where December went. I hope all had a very merry Christmas and are looking forward to a great new year. A quick shout out to the Auxiliary units that sponsored the VA and veterans Christmas parties. I made it to all the South Dakota VA parties as well as the Human Services and State Veterans home. Those involved did a great job and put a lot of smiles on veterans faces and put them in the holiday mood. Thanks!!



I can't believe my time as Department Commander is over half done. Not counting flights and times I used my personal vehicles, I have traveled on almost 14,000 miles visiting posts, attending special events and other meetings.

A couple of topics for this month. The first is membership. Thanks for all the hard work for membership this year. As of 28 December, we are still number one in the nation with over 83% of goal. However, please don't let up. From my many years of experience, this is the time we start to fall back. Not sure why, might be the new year or focusing on other items. But please continue to contact those who have not renewed and look for the new folks that just need to be asked.

My second topic is community involvement. As I have gone around the department this year, I have seen some great examples of being involved. Veteran suicide awareness events, flag etiquette classes in the schools, park clean ups, veteran memorials and working with children are all influencing our communities. With our events, we also need to "tell our stories" so those not familiar with the Legion family will understand what we do and they just might decide these events are something they want to get involved in.

One last reminder before I close my column. I will be holding an online Town Hall meeting at 7 pm central time on January 13 via Teams and by phone. Look for additional information in the Up To Now. Have a great month and looking forward to seeing everyone at Midwinter in Oacoma.



Kevin Hempel
 Department Commander
 Legion family working together,
 Involved in our communities,
 Serving our veterans, children, and communities
 Telling our stories.

DEPARTMENT MEMBERSHIP MESSAGE

By Bill Peters, Department Membership Chairman

Welcome to 2026. A new year brings new opportunities, and if the momentum we're seeing right now is any indication, this is going to be a great year for The American Legion and for South Dakota.

First and foremost, thank you. The work you are doing on membership is making a real difference. Because of your dedication, South Dakota currently stands number one in the nation in overall membership and number one in renewals. That does not happen by accident. It happens because Legionnaires across this state believe in the mission and are willing to put in the effort to strengthen our

organization. You should be proud of that accomplishment.

Membership is more than just a number. It is our strength. It is our voice. Through strong membership, The American Legion maintains credibility and influence in Congress and at the state level. As our South Dakota Legislative Session begins in just a few days, that strong voice will be more important than ever. When we advocate for veterans, service members, and their families, lawmakers listen because we represent a united, engaged, and growing membership.

My personal goal is for us to reach 90% membership by Mid-Winter. With the momentum we have right now, this goal is absolutely achievable. We need 992 more members to reach that mark, and I believe we can get there together. Every conversation, every renewal, and every new member strengthens our ability to serve and advocate.

The American Legion makes a difference every day. We support veterans navigating benefits, assist families during difficult times, mentor youth, honor our fallen, and continue to stand up for those who have worn the uniform. None of that happens without strong membership backing our mission.

Let's keep the energy going. Let's keep reaching out, telling our story, and inviting others to be part of something bigger than themselves. What we do matters, and the impact reaches far beyond our posts and communities.

Thank you again for everything you do. Keep up the great work, and I look forward to seeing you all at Mid-Winter in February.

MYLEGION TRAINING

📅 January 17, 2026, ⏰ 1000–1500 hours

📍 Sioux Falls Post 15, 1700 West Russell Street, Sioux Falls

💻 Microsoft Teams will also be available (for those unable to attend in person) link is:

Overview: Hands-on MyLegion training for members and officers. Also CPR training as time permits.

Refreshments: 🍩 Donuts & coffee and 🍽️ Lunch provided

Requirements: 💻 Laptop computer, iPad, tablet strongly recommended, ✓ MyLegion registration required

▣ **RSVP requested mainly for lunch count**

Assistance: ☎ Call Bill at 605-360-6547 for help with registration or group permissions no later than Thru Jan 15.

2026 SD AMERICAN LEGION DEPT COLLEGE

April 18–19, 2026 | Oacoma, SD

The South Dakota American Legion Department College returns this April with a focused, high-impact leadership program designed to strengthen the future of our organization. This two-day course provides current and emerging Legion leaders with a deeper understanding of our history, structure, programs, and the essential responsibilities of effective post, district, and department leadership.

Participants will explore:

- The mission, values, and organizational framework of The American Legion
- Roles and responsibilities at every level of leadership
- Best practices in membership, communication, and community engagement
- Parliamentary procedure, meeting management, and governance
- Department programs, resources, and strategic priorities

This is a hands-on, discussion-driven course built to prepare the next generation of Legion leadership with the knowledge and confidence to serve effectively.

Per Diem & Travel Support- Attendees will receive per diem at the Dept. rate to help cover travel, meals, and lodging. The Department is committed to removing barriers so that dedicated members can participate.

Limited Class Size- To ensure a high-quality learning

environment, class size is capped at ten (10) participants. Early application is strongly encouraged.

How to Apply- Applications are available online at:

<https://sdlegion.org/ufile/f1/pdf/training/department-training-tools/2024-SDLC-Application.pdf>

As of this publication, we have one applicant. If you, or someone in your post, has been considering stepping into leadership, this is the perfect opportunity. **Submit your application today and help us build the strong, informed leadership our organization deserves.**

AMERICANISM UPDATE: ONWARD TO AMERICA250!

As we begin 2026, our Americanism programs are already gaining momentum across South Dakota. Post Oratorical Contests have wrapped up, and District competitions should now be in full swing. Thank you to the Posts, volunteers, educators, and families who continue to support this premier program—giving young Americans the opportunity to speak with confidence and conviction about the U.S. Constitution.

Looking ahead, Department Mid-Winter is fast approaching. Volunteers willing to help are encouraged to reach out to me directly. Your time and talents help ensure a successful event for our Department. carol.howitz@gmail.com **605-645-3411**

This year also marks an exciting milestone as we continue the Challenge 250 initiative. I ask each Post and individual Legionnaire to share how you're participating—whether through miles walked, service hours, community engagement, or creative patriotic efforts. Please send updates on both individual and Post-level activities so we can highlight and celebrate the incredible work happening across the Department.

Challenge 250 ties directly into America 250, and we are now just 6 months away from our Nation's Semi-quincentennial—250 years of independence, sacrifice, and democratic ideals. I encourage every Post to be actively involved in your city or town's planning efforts and to consider how The American Legion can lead or support local commemorations. Whether through ceremonies, educational events, youth activities, or Legion-hosted celebrations, our presence matters. Opportunities and activities will be coming soon to District Americanism Officers outlining national and state-level programs, resources, and activities available throughout this historic year.

Let us honor the past, serve the present, and inspire the future as we proudly celebrate our independence. Together, let's make America's 250th a moment worthy of our legacy.

BOYS STATE AND YOUTH TROOPER ACADEMY

Applications Now Open!

It's that time of year again—when we help launch the next generation of South Dakota's leaders! Applications are officially open for **South Dakota Boys State** and the **Youth Trooper Academy**, two of the most dynamic, confidence-building youth programs in the state.

These aren't just summer programs, they're life-changing experiences where students discover their strengths, build lifelong friendships, and learn what it means to lead with purpose.

South Dakota Boys State- A week of hands-on government, leadership, and teamwork. Delegates run for office, pass legislation, debate issues, and experience the responsibilities of citizenship in a fast-paced, immersive environment. Many alumni say it's the moment they first realized they could lead.

Youth Trooper Academy (YTA)- For students ready for a challenge, YTA offers an inside look at law enforcement, teamwork, and personal discipline. Cadets train alongside Highway Patrol troopers, learn real-world skills, and push themselves in ways they never expected.

Recruitment Starts NOW- These programs fill quickly—and the impact lasts a lifetime. Now is the perfect moment to start talking with schools, parents, counselors, and community partners. Encourage motivated young people to step forward and take advantage of these incredible opportunities. Applications for both programs are available at: <https://sdlegion.org/programs>

Let's help shape the leaders of tomorrow, get the word out today.

2026 MIDWINTER SCHEDULE- Subject to CHANGE

Thursday, February 19, 2026

TBD Strategic Planning Ad-hoc Committee Meeting- Hale

Friday, February 20, 2026

10:00am Department Finance Commission Meeting- Hale

12:00pm LUNCH BREAK

Registration Desk Opens- Reception Area

1:00pm Department Executive Committee Meeting- Hale
Boys State Corp- Board Room

3:00pm SDAL Foundation Meeting- Hale

SAL Detachment Executive Committee Meeting- Howe

4:00pm American Legion Rider meeting- Hale

5:30pm No-Host Cocktails- Reception Area

6:30pm American Legion Joint Family Banquet

Saturday, February 21, 2026

7:30am Registration Desk Opens- Reception Area

8:00am Joint Opening Session- Wheeler/Oacoma

8:05am Department Commander- Wheeler/Oacoma

8:10am Department Auxiliary President- Wheeler/Oacoma

8:15am Sons of the American Legion- Wheeler/Oacoma

8:20am American Legion Rider Liaison- Wheeler/Oacoma

8:25am National Executive Committeeman- Wheeler/Oacoma

8:30am Legion Family Open Town Hall- Wheeler/Oacoma

9:00am Boys State Planning Session- Board Room

9:15am Department of Veterans Affairs- Wheeler/Oacoma

9:35am Legislative Update- Wheeler/Oacoma

9:45am Training Committee Report- Wheeler/Oacoma

9:55am Recess Joint Session to separate meetings

10:00am BREAKOUT SESSION 1:

Class A- 21 Century Membership Planning - Wheeler/Oacoma

Class B- Running a Meeting and Robert's Rules- Glass

Class D- Welcoming New Members- Howe

11:00am SAL American Legion Basic Training- Hale

11:30am BREAKOUT SESSION 2:

Class A – 21 Century Membership Planning- Wheeler/Oacoma

Class B- Running a Meeting and Robert's Rules- Glass

Class C- Constitution and Bylaws & Reports and Awards- Howe

1:00pm LUNCH BREAK

SAL Business meeting- Hale

1:30pm BREAKOUT SESSION 3:

Class A - 21 Century Membership Planning - Wheeler/Oacoma

Class D- Welcoming New Members- Glass

Class C- Constitution and Bylaws & Reports and Awards- Howe

3:00pm Reconvene Legion Session- Wheeler/Oacoma

SAL Open Forum Question and Answer- Hale

3:05pm Membership Update & Turn-Ins- Wheeler/Oacoma

3:20pm VAVS Chairman- Wheeler/Oacoma

3:30pm Boys State Update- Wheeler/Oacoma

3:40pm Youth Trooper Update- Wheeler/Oacoma

3:50pm Athletic Commission Update- Wheeler/Oacoma

4:00pm Children and Youth Update- Wheeler/Oacoma

4:10pm Youth Shooting Sports Update- Wheeler/Oacoma

4:20pm Scouting Committee Update- Wheeler/Oacoma

4:50pm Sweepstakes Drawing- Wheeler/Oacoma

5:00pm Announcements and Adjourn Assembly- Wheeler/Oacoma

6:00pm Go-Getter & Awards- Chamberlain Community Center

Sunday, February 22, 2026

8:30am Four Chaplains Service- Wheeler/Oacoma
10:30am Oratorical State Finals- Wheeler/Oacoma

2026 MIDWINTER LUNCH & BANQUET TICKETS

A taco bar lunch buffet will be served at noon on Fri Feb 20th and a burger bar (beef burger or grilled chicken breast) on Sat Feb 21st of the Mid-Winter Conference. Tickets are \$20 per person each day.

Chicken Marsala with lettuce salad, baked potato, corn, and dinner rolls will be served at the banquet Friday evening Feb 20th with a ticket cost of \$30 per person.

Ticket requests for all Legion, Auxiliary and SAL members must be received no later than January 26, 2026. No tickets will be sold at the event. Tickets can be picked up at the conference registration table. One check can be made for the total lunch and banquet ticket costs.

Please make checks payable to Potter Post #3. Ticket requests should be sent to:

John Payer, 25120 344th Ave, Chamberlain, SD 57325

NAME _____

PHONE NUMBER _____

ADDRESS _____

FOOD ALLERGIES _____

EVENT	PRICE	NUMBER OF TICKETS	COST
Friday lunch	\$20	x	= \$
Saturday lunch	\$20	x	= \$
Friday banquet	\$30	x	= \$
		TOTAL	= \$

BREAKFAST AT CEDAR SHORE FOR MIDWINTER

A breakfast buffet will be available both Friday and Saturday mornings in the cafe starting at 6:30am at a cost of \$12.86 plus gratuity. This is on your own and no tickets are required.

GO GETTER CERTIFICATION

Please send your Go Getter Certification to Dept by Feb 1st for Mid-Winter. judy@sdlegion.org The form is available online in the Post Adjutant Manual Forms <https://sdlegion.org/post-adjutant-manual-forms>. Go out and Get them, all!

THE AMERICAN LEGION LEGACY SCHOLARSHIP

This needs-based scholarship designed to fulfill a financial gap remaining after all federal and state educational grants/scholarships available to an eligible applicant have been utilized. Children of post-9/11 veterans having been assigned a combined disability rating of 50 percent or greater or who died while on active duty on or after Sept. 11, 2001, are eligible. All applications new or renewal must be submitted using the online scholarship submission system beginning January 1 and NO LATER THAN Wednesday, March 25, 2026.

Total amount of scholarship funds awarded in 2024: \$1,645,558.

<https://www.legion.org/get-involved/scholarships/the-american-legion-legacy-scholarship>

NATIONAL COMMANDER'S INCENTIVE PROGRAM

National Commander Dan Wiley will award his national commander **Be the One membership incentive pin** to any Legionnaire who obtains two new Legion members. A new member is for the 2026 membership year who was not a member of during

the 2025 year. Transfers do not count. [Download the form](#)

103% Membership Award- Commander Wiley will award his Be the One membership incentive pin to any post, county, district, or department or membership chair who achieves 103% of their assigned membership goal for 2026. [Download Award Form](#)

To qualify for the **Post Excellence Award** a post must achieve in four areas: membership, Consolidated Post Report, 90% renewal rate, and community activity. Standard to be achieved is:

1. **Membership:** 103% of Post goal. At least one post officer attends district meetings.
2. **Consolidated Post Report:** CPRs must be submitted by July 1.
3. **90% Renewal:** Of their members that were on the 2024 roster.
4. **Community Activity:** The post must conduct an event that connects the local community with The American Legion post.

Certification for the award: The district commander responsible for the post will certify a post and submit to Dept HQ.

100% American Legion Family Ribbon

Commander Wiley will award his 100% American Legion Family Ribbon to any American Legion Family that achieves 100% membership by the 2026 100% membership target date.

2026 SOUTH DAKOTA EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

Nominations Now Open! It's time to shine a spotlight on the incredible teachers who are shaping South Dakota's future! The Dept Education Committee is calling on all local Posts to partner with their area schools and help identify outstanding educators worthy of the title **South Dakota Educator of the Year** for the 2025–2026 school year.

Every community has that one teacher who goes above and beyond—who inspires, motivates, and makes a lasting impact. *This is your chance to help them get the recognition they deserve.*

How It Works...

- Local Posts should work directly with their schools to find exceptional candidates.
- Submit your nominee to your **District Commander** before your Spring District Meeting.
- District Commanders forward district selections to Dept HQ **no later than May 1, 2026.**

Learn More- Full program details and nomination materials are available at: <https://sdlegion.org/educator-of-the-year>

Let's celebrate the educators who pour their hearts into our youth every day. Start the conversation in your community and help us honor South Dakota's best!

THE RACE IS ON FOR DEPARTMENT OFFICERS...

Sioux Falls Post 15 endorses Bill Peters for Department Commander.

Greer Post 11 of Wagner endorsed Greg Geiman for State Sergeant-At-Arms.

Spearfish Post 164 endorses Fred Nelson for National Executive Committeeman

Chamberlain Potter Post 3 endorses Doug Feltman for Alternate National Executive Committeeman

SD DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

FUNERAL HONORS STIPEND REQUEST FORM UPDATE

The SDDVA provides reimbursement to congressionally chartered veterans service organizations for services in conducting military funeral honors. **SDDVA Form 3 has been updated.** All stipend requests submitted by the April 15th deadline must be completed using the updated version of the form. Outdated versions will no longer be accepted, download and use the updated form when preparing your submissions. [SDDVA Burial Benefits](#)

If you have any questions or need assistance accessing the new form, reach out to the SDDVA office at dj.montreal@state.sd.us

SCOUTS' VET GRAVE DOCUMENTATION EFFORT

A group of Eagle Scouts in Sioux Falls is leading an impressive project to document the graves of veterans buried in civilian cemeteries—and their work is already making an impact.

The Scouts have photographed headstones, recorded GPS coordinates, and gathered service details for every veteran they can identify. Their goal is to upload this information to the **Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM)**, the VA's online platform that preserves veterans' stories. Many entries on the VLM are incomplete or missing entirely, and the Scouts' work helps families, researchers, and communities locate and honor these veterans more accurately.

All Sioux Falls cemeteries and several around Hartford have already been completed, and the idea is spreading—another Scout in Virginia has begun a similar effort. The hope is that youth groups, schools, and veterans' organizations, including local Legion posts, will join in. Legion members are especially well-positioned to help identify veterans and guide documentation in their communities.

This project also highlights the need to educate veterans and families about VLM and how they can update or add information about their loved ones. With America's 250th anniversary approaching, this effort could become a meaningful statewide contribution to preserving veterans' legacies.

If you or your Post is interested in being involved, contact the Dept ADJ for more information.

C&Y PROGRAM EFFORTS STILL NEEDS OUR HELP!

Happy New Year!!! We have all made it through the Holidays, well rested and ready to take on a new year. It appears that there were many Post, Unit's, Sons and Rider groups within the Department that hosted some sort of holiday event or gift distribution event. This is great stuff as it shows our veterans, children of our veterans, and community members that we are here to support and serve, in good times and in bad. This is awesome! When planning, hosting and following up on these events, we should all make sure that we crow, shout, toot our own horns, and thank our communities, before and after these events. Community support is vital to the success of our programs.

Looking forward for the remainder of the calendar year, I hope to work out the logistics between the SD National Guard and the Legion family for the distribution of many boxes of donated school supplies and toys from various Dollar Tree stores and private donations from across the state. The easiest way to offer these donations to our state's NG members is to set up donation and information tables at the various SDR events held in SD a few times a year. Updates regarding this program will be submitted in our newsletters over the next few months as to how each of our organizations can assist with this program.

Posts in the State have been working requests for TFA recently. Veterans with children at home that are struggling with their finances can receive help from the American Legion by submitting a request for TFA. Forms to start the TFA process can be found at www.sdlegion.org/sdal-tfa-form For questions about this process, please contact me for assistance.

Report season is right around the corner. Be sure to share some photos of your year and write up a little something about your C&Y programs. If there were some outstanding events by members in your Post or within your community, let us know so we can celebrate their efforts.

For any questions regarding what's happening with the C&Y program within the Department of South Dakota, contact me anytime. Thank you again for all your help within the state to support our C&Y programs.

Submitted by,
Harry Boner, Dept C&Y Chairman, 605-691-4571