

Local Legionnaire hears President, top government leaders make their case to nation's veterans

Written by Norma Seehusen

Tuesday, 13 September 2011 09:19

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Minneapolis (Sept. 1, 2011) – Norma Seehusen was among more than 3,000 leaders of The American Legion attending the nation's largest wartime veterans organization's 93rd National Convention in Minneapolis.

Seehusen is a member of Post 588 in Pocahontas, IA and is active in programs that benefit veterans, their families and the children of this area. Highlights of the three-day gathering included addresses by President Barak Obama, Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs Gen. Eric Shinseki, Minority Leader of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi, Sen. Al Franken and Rep. Michelle Bachmann, among others.

President Obama told Legionnaires that while the United States is in a time of fiscal restraint, that the restraint won't include cutting benefits of America's veterans.

"As a nation, we're facing tough choices as we put our fiscal house in order," the president said, getting a standing ovation from the crowd of thousands in the process. "But I want to be absolutely clear: We cannot, we must not, and we will not balance the budget on the backs of our veterans. And as commander-in-chief, I won't allow it."

Secretary of the Dept. of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki said that VA and the Department of Defense "will spearhead a government-wide effort to reform the way members transition out of the military services. Every member will receive the training, education and credentials needed to successfully transition to the civilian workforce or to pursue higher education."

House Democratic Leader Rep. Nancy Pelosi told delegates, "In the weeks ahead ... Congress will take up the budget at a table of 12," Pelosi said. "I want The American Legion, and all of

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America to know - that the values of America's veterans will have a strong presence at that congressional table. I want to assure you that as we reduce the deficit, America's veterans will not be short-changed. Meeting the needs of our veterans ... is a value of the American people that we will protect in those negotiations.

"Supporting our veterans is a bipartisan cause," Pelosi said. "That's the beautiful part of it. It's a place we can all come together. America's veterans have earned our respect by their actions, their bravery and their valor, their willingness to step forward and serve on our behalf."

Among the major events preceding the Legion's 93rd National Convention in Minneapolis was a veterans hiring fair produced jointly by The American Legion and the United States Chamber of Commerce. Legion organizers [praised the hiring fair](#) as among the most productive of recent Legion-sponsored career fairs and credited the U.S. Chamber's participation, through its network of local and regional chambers of commerce, for its success. The Legion hiring event was the 19th in an initial series of 100 veterans career fairs to be co-produced by the U.S. Chamber and veterans' advocates nationwide as part of its 'Hiring our Heroes' initiative.

Kevin Schmiegel, vice president of veterans' employment programs at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, announced the impending rollout of three additional components in the organization's concerted campaign to employ military veterans. The official announcement of the program expansion will be made on Veterans Day, said Schmiegel, but Legionnaires were being given a "sneak preview."

Delegates to The American Legion National Convention also heard special reports from two dozen committees and adopted resolutions that will guide the organization's legislative and operational efforts for the coming year. National Commander Jimmie L. Foster reported on progress made during his year as leader of the nation's largest veterans organization, praising Legionnaires for their successes in advocating for veterans, a strong national defense, Americanism and youth programs.

The convention ended with the election of Fang Wong of New York, a retired Army Chief Warrant Officer and Vietnam War veteran, as the new national commander.

Seehusen and other American Legion leaders left Minneapolis with a renewed sense of urgency in meeting the needs of today's military while helping other veterans and the nation. Issues high on the agenda for the coming year include: jobs for veterans, supporting our armed forces during the war on terrorism; reducing the backlog of VA disability claims and veteran homelessness, returning to the American people the right to protect the U.S. Flag from desecration and immediate enforcement of immigration laws with no amnesty.