

VFW National Convention Returns to Orlando

Secretary of State Pompeo headlines Monday, followed by VA Secretary Wilkie Tuesday

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert Wilkie will be joining more than 10,000 members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and its Auxiliary at the 120th VFW National Convention as it convenes this Saturday through July 24 at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Fla. The business sessions are closed to the public, but a free, two-day weekend veterans walk-in claims clinic and four-day health fair are accessible to all veterans, service members and their families in West Hall C-WD1.

“It’s been 11 years since our last national convention was held in Orlando, so it is great to be back!” exclaimed VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence, of Alamogordo, N.M., “and we are honored to have two cabinet secretaries join us next week, as well as recognize some very deserving individuals with the VFW’s highest national awards,” he said.

“We hope to hear Secretary Pompeo address issues, challenges and successes as it pertains to America’s overseas alliances, returning missing and unaccounted-for service members home to their families, and ongoing efforts to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons and material,” he said. “From Secretary Wilkie, we look forward to hearing about ongoing initiatives to return VA benefits to Blue Water Navy Veterans, as well as the proper implementation of the MISSION Act, and program enhancements to women’s health, mental health, homelessness, and access to VA care.”

The VFW national commander explained that the 10,000 VFW and VFW Auxiliary delegates represent the organization’s total membership of more than 1.6 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. In addition, convention delegates will also elect a new VFW national commander, William J. “Doc” Schmitz, of Corning, N.Y., as well as recognize prominent individuals and

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organizations for their support of the veterans and military communities.

Receiving VFW national awards on Monday and Tuesday are:

VFW Americanism Award to [Ann Mills-Griffiths](#), Chairman of the Board, [National League of POW/MIA Families](#)

VFW Armed Forces Award to Adm. Michelle Howard, U.S. Navy retired

VFW Citizenship Award to [Ken Fisher](#), Chairman & CEO, Fisher House Foundation

VFW Commander-in-Chief's Gold Medal of Merit to [Maj. Gen. Kelly McKeague](#), U.S. Air Force retired, Director, [Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency](#)

VFW Commander-in-Chief's Gold Medal of Merit to Brig. Gen. Jack Hammond, U.S. Army retired, Executive Director, [Red Sox Foundation](#) and [Massachusetts General Home Base Program](#)

[VFW National Teacher Awards](#) to:

- Bobbie Schamens, 4th grade teacher, Meadowview Intermediate School, Sparta, Wisc.
- Anne Martin, 7th grade teacher, Williams Middle School, Tracy, Calif.
- Kevin Wagner, AP teacher, Carlisle High School, Carlisle, Pa.

VFW Fred C. Hall Outstanding Post Special Project Award to VFW Post 10555, Panama City Beach, Fla.

[Mike Eshenbaugh](#), VFW Accredited Service Representative of the Year

[Christine Troll](#), \$30,000 VFW Voice of Democracy winner

[VFW National Home for Children](#) 2019 Buddy Poppy Child Brooklyn Hekman, age 9

Also coming to town Tuesday for the VFW Patriotic Rally will be [Sailor Jerri](#) and the U.S. Army's own [Six-String Soldiers](#).

Although not open to the public, the VFW National Convention will livestream its July 22-24 business sessions at VFW.org/convention beginning at 8 a.m. EDT. Only registered and credentialed media from bona fide news organizations will be approved to cover convention activities. [Click here to pre-register](#). Onsite registration begins Saturday, July 20, at the VFW Communications Office inside the Orange County Convention Center, West Hall C-WD1.

Major sponsors of the VFW 120th National Convention are [USAA](#) and [Philips](#).