

American Legion Interaction with other Veterans Service Organizations
Personal Statement – David Rehbein

This statement represents my personal opinions and views and is not an official policy statement of The American Legion, either the national organization or the Department of Iowa.

Reference was made at the July 9, 2014 Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs meeting regarding The American Legion's resolution #37 from the May 4-5, 1988 meeting of the National Executive Committee. That resolution states in part, "That The American Legion shall not be a member of, or affiliated with, any organization, committee, association, council or group whereby The American Legion might be committed to a policy contrary to that adopted by The American Legion".

Questions have arisen as to The American Legion's participation with or non-participation with The Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs, the Iowa Veterans Council and the Iowa Veterans Legislative Coalition.

The American Legion recognizes the Iowa Veterans Affairs Commission as an official body of the government of Iowa. We are pleased to have the opportunity to make recommendations to the Governor of knowledgeable, active veterans and Legionnaires to serve on the Commission. Since those are only recommendations with the Governor being the responsible authority for selection, we do not view anyone who serves due to our recommendation as being bound by the decisions of The American Legion or as binding The American Legion by their actions on the commission. Further, since the Commission acts on behalf of the state of Iowa and does not and cannot act on behalf of The American Legion, we see no conflict between their role and our resolution #37.

The By-Laws for the Iowa Veterans Council as initially written required a unanimous vote of all member organizations for approval of an amendment of those By-Laws or endorsement of a particular legislative position. That requirement for unanimous decisions allowed The Iowa American Legion to officially participate in the Council at that time and not violate Resolution #37.

Some years later and I regret I do not have the exact date of the meeting; discussion began toward changing the requirement to endorse a legislative position from unanimity to a majority vote of the organizations. During the time of that discussion, actions of a few Legionnaires brought our participation in the Council to the official attention of the National Organization of The American Legion. Without going into detail, that resulted in a very strongly worded letter from The American Legion's National Judge Advocate to the Department of Iowa cautioning us on the requirements as stated in Resolution #37.

At the meeting during which the By-Laws change was considered, the representatives of The American Legion made clear that the proposed change, if adopted, would require The American Legion to withdraw from the Council. Further in order to not dictate to the other organizations, The American Legion would abstain from the vote on the proposed By-Laws change and not execute an effective veto. Being present at that meeting, I can speak clearly on the stated position of The American Legion.

Having made those statements as part of the discussion on the proposed amendment, The American Legion asked that the unanimous requirement be kept in place in order to allow

our continued participation on the Iowa Veterans Council and thereby keep the Iowa Veterans Council an organization whereby all the Veterans organization truly would be speaking with one voice. That request was denied with the proposed amendment to a majority vote being approved. The American Legion withdrew from the Council and while we continue to cooperate with them, we cannot return to full membership.

Discussion has also been held regarding The American Legion and the Iowa Veterans Legislative Coalition. We have seen none of the foundational documents of the coalition. We have no knowledge of how and by whom members of the coalition are selected, how their leadership is chosen or the method by which they choose legislative positions to endorse. Without that knowledge, we cannot ask our Department Executive Committee for authority to join the coalition. If those documents can be made available to our Department leadership, we can make a much more informed decision on participation.

The American Legion's legislative positions are determined solely by vote on the floor of the Department convention in July each year or by action of the Department Executive Committee (DEC) whose meetings are held at various times during the year. Our Fall DEC meeting will be held this year on Oct 25 at which we will finalize our legislative program. Timing of this meeting and the meetings of the Council and Coalition require advance communication between the groups in order to achieve a unified legislative program identical to all.

That advance communication has not always occurred so that at times the various legislative programs have not been identical. To the best of my knowledge. The American Legion has never taken a position in opposition to that of the other organizations. We have at times declared ourselves as officially "Undecided" on a particular issue since that proposed legislation did not arise in time for discussion by our DEC. We can deal with votes by mail on emergency issues but hesitate to use that method since it eliminates discussion by those voting.

It is my hope that this statement will help clarify the position of The American Legion. As a active, involved veteran and former Commissioner, it disturbs me to see a government body, the Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs, being used to discuss, critique and criticize the affairs and decision-making methods of a private organization.

Page 262 of the Iowa Official Register states "the commission advises and makes recommendations to the department, the General Assembly, and the Governor concerning ~~the management and operation of the department. The commission supervises the~~ commandant's administration of commission policy for the operation and conduct of the Iowa Veterans Home."

Nowhere does it address that the commission has any responsibility regarding overseeing the affairs of the veterans service organizations or the Iowa Veterans Council. My personal belief is that the veterans service organizations and the Iowa Veterans Council should be monitoring and overseeing the activities of the Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs in a similar fashion to the relationship between the veterans' service organizations and the Department of Veterans Affairs nationally. I hope that in future the Iowa Veterans Affairs Commission can restrict their discussions to those areas specified in their authorization.

I repeat that this is a personal statement and not any official position of The American Legion and ask that this statement be included as part of the records of the meeting.