



Council 4 AFSCME requests that you **amend SB 211, AAC the Soldiers, Sailors and Marines Fund**, to return the Soldiers, Sailors and Marines Fund to state government. While the American Legion has a role to play in our society, we feel that it is not a good idea to have the legion as the distributor of state funds to service families.

It is vital for a society to show its respect to returning veterans, particularly in the time of war. It is even more important for our state to give assistance to veterans and their families. Armed services pay and benefits are often not enough for these families to make ends meet. Connecticut deserves credit among the state's for having established and maintained the Soldiers, Sailors and Marines Fund since the ending of World War I.

Veterans should know when they receive help from the fund that they are receiving it from Connecticut taxpayers. Having a private third party organization give the aid directly to veterans blurs the line between where the help came from and who is receiving it. Also, having a private organization, reliant on selling memberships, hand out the money seems inappropriate.

We have recently read in the news that the American Legion is unhappy with the legislation that hands over the distribution duties of the fund to them. The American Legion said in the newspapers that they do not wish to perform these duties via the arrangement made in last year's legislation. We agree that the arrangement in which the legion takes on the current Soldiers, Sailors and Marines Fund duties is not in the best interests of veterans or taxpayers.

The American Legion, though a non-profit is a very political organization. The legion has been roundly criticized for espousing nativist politics in regards to immigration. The legion has disseminated anti-immigrant information that has turned out to be factually incorrect. The legion has opposed plans for a road map to citizenship for undocumented workers and families in the U.S. This is ironic, because one of the first United States soldiers killed in the Iraq invasion in 2003 was Jesus Suarez, a Mexican national. How is a veteran, similar to Private Suarez to feel if when applying for SSMF help, he must go to the American Legion to receive it. It is improper for the state to privatize out its role to the legion. We urge restoration of this basic and vital function to state government.

Thank you for your consideration. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

Brian Anderson



March 22, 2005

Mexican Pride and Death in U.S. Service

By JAMES C. MCKINLEY Jr.

EGOLLADO, Mexico - The shrine set up on a broken television in the corner would be familiar to many American military families. The somber Stars and Stripes is folded neatly in a triangle, encased in wood and glass. A couple of medals lie in boxes, inert as rocks, collecting dust.

A stern young man in his dress United States Army uniform peers at visitors from a small photograph. His dog tags hang beside the photo. A photo of the same young man with his even younger wife, caught in a swirl of laughter, is nearby. These are the relics of a life cut short, in the name of honor, liberty and country. The question is whose?

What seems odd is that the mementos are not in a living room in upstate New York or rural Virginia, but in an impoverished house with concrete floors in a dusty town deep in the hills of central Mexico. The soldier, Pfc. Jesús Fonseca, 19, was not an American citizen, but one of at least 22 Mexican citizens who have died fighting for the United States in two years of war.

As of January, about 41,000 permanent resident aliens were in the United States armed forces - 3,639 of them from Mexico. The Mexicans are the largest group among the 63 immigrants who have been killed in action in Iraq, the Pentagon says.

It is a fact that points to Mexico's ambivalent yet deeply intertwined relationship with the United States, the country Mexico fought its last war against, and lost. That defeat, in 1848, is not forgotten here.

Yet so many Mexicans have migrated to the United States seeking jobs in recent years that they and their children are willing to fight and die for it, even if they are frequently motivated more by economic necessity than patriotism.

For many, armed service is seen as a fast track to citizenship. During wartime, foreigners with residency permits need only to serve honorably for their citizenship to be all but guaranteed, immigration officials said. Of course, they must survive as well.

Indeed, in a cruel twist, soldiers like Private Fonseca, who in the horrible minutes of Jan. 17 took a sniper's bullet in the stomach while patrolling in Ramadi, are accorded citizenship only after death.

"He lost his life for another flag," said his cousin Noé Beltrán, echoing the views of many

[Intelligence Report, Fall 2008, Issue Number: 131](#)

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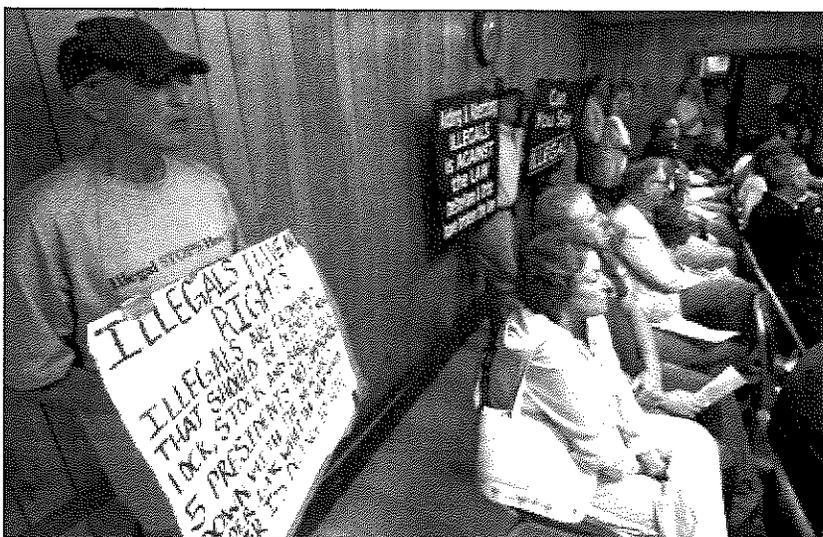
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By [Sonia Scherr](#)



An American Legion post in East Haven, Conn., opened its doors last year to anti-immigration activists including Walter Moore (with sign). (AP)

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Since its founding nearly 90 years ago, the American Legion has been a fixture of community life. It has hosted Memorial Day parades to remember those who died in America's wars. It has held bingo nights and dances at its 14,000-plus posts worldwide. It has supported thousands of Boy Scouts groups, sponsored a baseball program that's produced numerous professional players, and helped children living in poverty or with special needs. From World War II to the war in Iraq, the legion has fought to improve benefits for veterans and their families.

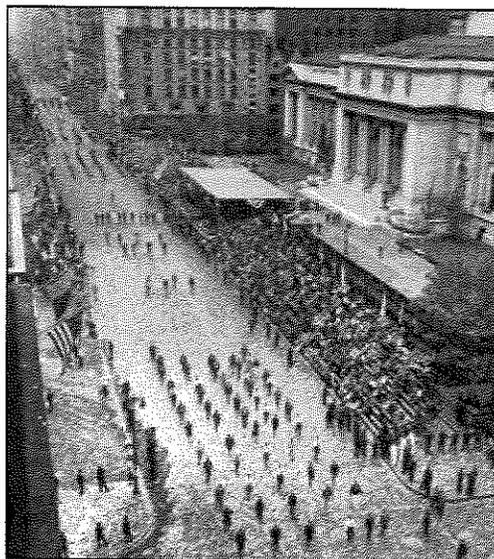
Now, America's largest veterans organization has launched another campaign — a hard-line attack on undocumented immigrants that's at odds with the legion's mainstream image. As part of this effort, the legion, which purports to speak for 2.7 million members, recently issued a booklet that regurgitates discredited and often completely false information about how "illegals" are bringing crime, disease, and terrorism to this country, even as they wreck the economy for natives.

The legion's 34-page booklet, *[A Strategy to Address Illegal Immigration in the United States](#)*, asserts that "poverty, political instability, disease and war" are "on our back doorstep" because of porous borders and the failure of the government to stringently enforce immigration laws. But in making its case, the legion repeatedly cites dubious sources, ignores well-known facts and makes baseless claims — such as the false assertion that the undocumented infected more than 7,000 people in America with leprosy during a recent four-year period.

"They're sort of trotting out old tropes to do with immigration," said Richard Wright, a Dartmouth College geography professor who specializes in immigration. "These are hackneyed stereotypes that have no place in a policy document."

That's not all. On April 28, when it released its booklet — which was actually a repackaged version of a May 2007 legion "white paper" — the group announced that its campaign would include letters to the editor, news releases from posts around the country, and six 60-second radio spots. These spots revisit some of the nastiest claims in the report, portraying undocumented immigrants as sex offenders, gang members, terrorists and murderers. Remarkably, they are delivered by Richard Fotherly, Kansas City chapter media adviser for the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps — a group whose members President Bush once denounced as "vigilantes."

The *Intelligence Report* sought comment from the American Legion and was directed to Robert Caudell, assistant director of its Americanism and Children & Youth Division. Caudell requested a detailed list of false or misleading claims, but then declined to address those claims once he had received it. Instead, he E-mailed a general statement pointing to the legion's recommendations to the government and arguing that the *Intelligence Report* was simply interpreting the same facts and statistics differently than the legion. "It's quite the same when two individuals witness an identical incident," Caudell wrote. "Each has his perspective, his personal assumptions, and often a disparate ability to describe the event."



That's not the way Hispanic veterans organizations see it. Felix Vargas, a retired Army colonel and the director of government relations for the largest such group, American GI Forum, told the *Intelligence Report* that the booklet was misleading and untruthful and called it a slap in the face to Hispanic legionnaires. "We didn't need this distraction,"

The American Legion, with its parades, conventions and hosting of politicians' speeches, has long been a fixture of American life. At times, it has also been associated with nativist xenophobia.

said Vargas, who served as an Army Ranger and Special Forces commander in Vietnam. "The legion crusade is a disservice to both the veteran community and the nation." Added Eric Rojo, the president of Hispanic War Veterans of America and another retired colonel: "Their position is absurd and ignorant. Someone didn't sit down and check the facts." And John Amaya, a staff attorney at the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, noted that 11% of the first 4,000 American casualties in Iraq were Latinos — and many of them are the children of undocumented residents of the United States.

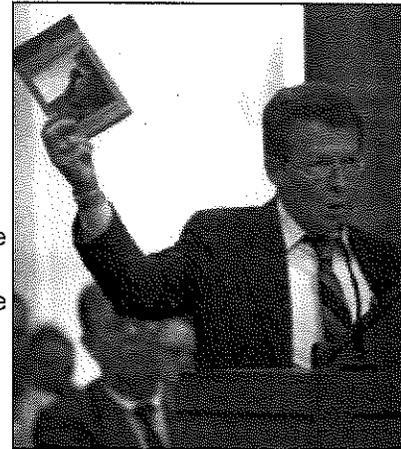
The American Legion actually has been engaged with nativist groups for some time. In 2004, its national convention in Nashville, Tenn., featured Dan Stein, leader of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), a strident nativist group that opposes both legal and illegal immigration. In March 2007, it held a forum on illegal immigration spotlighting nativist heavyweights like the leaders of NumbersUSA and the Center for Immigration Studies. It has allowed its posts to be used for gatherings of the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps. And this spring, it gave its "National Commander's Public Relations Award" to CNN anchor Lou Dobbs, who has himself regularly presented false data about immigrants.

At times in its history, the legion has made other forays into nativist politics. In 1937, the legion published *A Review of Alien Isms, Revolutionary Communism and their Active Sympathizers in the United States*, which linked immigrants to what was seen as the ultimate evil "ism": communism. The book claimed that immigrant children accounted for most of those attending communist summer camps and that other supposedly subversive groups were also heavily populated by immigrants. It demanded enhanced border patrols, immediate deportation of the undocumented and slashing of all immigration quotas by 90%. After World War I, when anti-Asian sentiment was sweeping the country, the legion on the West Coast championed policies that discriminated against Japanese-Americans. This attitude also affected the national legion, whose committee to investigate Asiatic immigration included a Seattle attorney who had served as president of his city's Anti-Japanese League, according to Tom Heuterman's *The Burning Horse*.

What follows is a sampling of the kind of claims that the American Legion is making with regard to undocumented immigrants, along with the actual situation, as revealed by statistics and interviews with non-partisan experts.

THE LEGION'S CLAIM American prisons "are crowded or full because of the illegals convicted of committing crimes against the people of the United States." Non-citizens make up fully 30% of the American prison population.

THE TRUTH As with many of its claims, the legion offers no source for this figure other than to claim that it has been "widely reported." A 2005 report by the nonpartisan General Accounting Office says that immigrants — both documented and undocumented — constitute 27% of federal prisoners. But fewer than 13% of incarcerated people in America are in federal prisons, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. When both federal and state prisoners are counted, about 6% are non-citizens; that is actually less than expected, because documented and undocumented immigrants make up roughly 8% of adults residing in the U.S.



Ed Hayes, director of the Kansas and Missouri chapters of the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps — a group whose members President Bush once called "vigilantes" — waves the American Legion's new nativist tract during testimony at the Kansas statehouse. (Anthony S. Bush/The Topeka Capital-Journal)

THE LEGION'S CLAIM Based on the same follow-up General Accounting Office (GAO) report, the legion states that 49% of all incarcerated illegal immigrants had prior felony convictions.

THE TRUTH The GAO report contains no such information, despite the fact that the American Legion report specifically cites it. What it does say is that of the offenses for which undocumented immigrants were arrested, just 12% were violent crimes.



Although the late Madeleine Cosman had lots to say about Latino immigrants — describing all such men, for example, as child-molesting rapists — the medievalist cookbook writer had no expertise on the subject whatsoever.

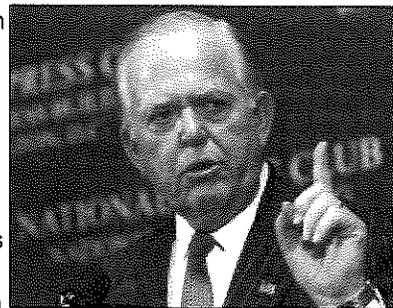
THE LEGION'S CLAIM A U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) program

aimed at catching child predators arrested more than 6,000 "illegal aliens" in its first two years. The legion also asserts that 240,000 undocumented immigrants are sex offenders.

THE TRUTH While it's true that Operation Predator made 6,000-plus arrests in its first two years, those arrested consisted of both documented and undocumented immigrants, as well as American citizens, according to ICE. About 85% of those arrested were foreign nationals (many of them documented), but this was no surprise, given that the operation specifically targeted foreign-born predators whose status made them deportable, along with U.S. citizens who engage in child sex tourism abroad. With regard to the total figure of undocumented sex offenders, the legion cites a self-published article from independent criminal profiler Deborah Schurman-Kauflin stating that 240,000 undocumented immigrants are sex offenders. Schurman-Kauflin based that figure on the assumption — for which she provided no specific source — that sex offenders account for 2% of all undocumented immigrants. She didn't respond to an E-mail from the *Intelligence Report* seeking clarification.

THE LEGION'S CLAIM Thousands of immigrants from countries with terrorist connections have been caught trying to enter the United States illegally. This claim is immediately followed by several paragraphs about illegal crossing of the Mexican border, suggesting that dangerous immigrants "from countries with known terrorist connections" are entering the U.S. via Mexico.

THE TRUTH A 2006 report by the Nixon Center, which appeared in the peer-reviewed *Terrorism and Political Violence* journal, found that the suggestion that terrorists were entering the U.S. through Mexico, while frightening, was entirely untrue: "Despite media alarms about terrorists concealed in the illegal traffic crossing the Mexican border, not a single subject entered from Mexico."



CNN anchor Lou Dobbs repeated and popularized false claims about immigrants and leprosy. When confronted by "60 Minutes" and numerous critics, Dobbs refused to correct his statements, saying his program did not make errors.

THE LEGION'S CLAIM "More Americans are killed by illegal aliens than die in the Iraq War."

THE TRUTH The legion cites no source for this allegation. Its claim appears to come from a February 2007 article by the editors of *Family Security Matters*, which frequently publishes breathless "exclusives" such as the one about Latinos titled, "Illegal Aliens Bring a Taliban Culture to the United States." The February 2007 article attributes its data to an article on the far-right *WorldNetDaily* website, which in turn cites blogger Mac Johnson. In 2005,

Johnson claimed — based, absurdly, on murder rates in immigrants' home countries — that undocumented immigrants kill 1,806 to 2,510 people every year. Applying that claim to the FBI's most recent murder total (15,854 murders in 2006) would mean that the undocumented, who number about 12 million people or 4% of the U.S. population, are responsible for 11.4% to 16.1% of U.S. murders. In plain English, that means the legion is claiming that undocumented immigrants murder U.S. citizens at a rate of three to four times that of the general population. In fact, nonpartisan studies have shown that immigrants of all kinds are significantly less criminal than their native-born American counterparts.

THE LEGION'S CLAIM The legion quotes a 2005 article in the *Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons* saying that many illegal immigrants "harbor fatal diseases that American medicine fought and vanquished long ago, such as drug-resistant tuberculosis, malaria, leprosy, plague, polio, dengue and Chagas disease. The influx of illegal aliens has serious hidden medical consequences." The legion also claims that drug-resistant tuberculosis cases have risen 25% recently.

THE TRUTH The "journal" the legion cites is a pseudo-scientific publication known for articles like the recent piece attempting to refute the well-established fact that the HIV virus causes AIDS. And the 2005 journal article's author, the late Madeleine Cosman, was a lawyer and medievalist with no medical expertise at all. She was also a rabid migrant hater, as evidenced by this 2005 comment about all Mexican male immigrants to the U.S.: "Most of these bastards molest girls under age 12, some as young as age 5, others age 3. Although, of course, some specialize in boys, some specialize in nuns, [and] some are exceedingly versatile and rape little girls age 11 and women up to age 79." It is true that certain diseases like Chagas disease are more prevalent among immigration populations. But the legion's claims are wildly overstated, suggesting real and widespread threats to the health of the general public. As an example, in the case of drug-resistant tuberculosis, the Centers for Disease Control reports that there were only 116 cases in 2006, the most recent year for which statistics are available. Overall, tuberculosis cases in the United States are at an all-time low since national reporting began in 1953.

THE LEGION'S CLAIM "Between 2000 and 2003, leprosy infected over 7,000 people in the U.S., brought to this country by illegal immigrants from India, Brazil, Mexico and the Caribbean." That compared to 900 cases in the prior 40 years.

THE TRUTH The legion's claim is based on a misreading of a *New York Times* article cited by Cosman in her journal article. In fact, just 453 cases were diagnosed in those years, according to the National Hansen's Disease [leprosy] Program. As program director James Krahenbuhl told the *Times*: "It's not a public health problem. That's the bottom line." The legion's claim has been popularized nationally by CNN host Lou Dobbs, who refused to retract his assertion even after it had been debunked by "60 Minutes" and many others.

THE LEGION'S CLAIM "Illegals cost Americans jobs."

THE TRUTH A 2006 Pew Hispanic Center study found that, overall, large increases in states' immigrant populations did not correspond with more unemployment for their native-born workers. While some scholars have said that undocumented workers depress wages for native-born high school

dropouts, most have failed to establish a link between immigration and job loss, said Richard Wright, the Dartmouth College professor. In fact, many experts have argued that immigration can lead to a net gain of jobs. Said Wright: "The actual effect on the economy is at worst minor, at best beneficial."

THE LEGION'S CLAIM "Illegal immigration ... causes an enormous drain on public services." Citing the partisan Center for Immigration Studies, which favors restricting immigration, the legion says undocumented immigrants don't pay nearly enough in taxes to compensate for the burden they place on public resources.

THE TRUTH Undocumented immigrants are barred from receiving most forms of public assistance, other than public school education and emergency medical care. But they do pay taxes, including sales taxes, and often, through phony Social Security cards, payroll taxes. In 2005, The New York Times reported that undocumented immigrants contribute some \$7 billion a year to the Social Security system that they will never be able to claim. Local and state governments, however, do not receive any benefit from that money and may, as a result, spend more on services to the undocumented than they get back in local taxes from them.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *While this story was being prepared, two key Latino groups — the American GI Forum, a veterans organization, and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund — met several times privately with leaders of the American Legion. In July, around the time this article was first published on the Southern Poverty Law Center's website, a note appeared on the legion's website saying that its immigration booklet was "being updated." But the legion offered no public clarification, retraction or any other statement about the booklet's errors.*

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