



## **American Legion Auxiliary Public Relations – Zoom Chat #5 (04/29/26)**

The American Legion Auxiliary Public Relations Zoom Chat #5 (April 29, 2026) serves as the concluding session in the PR Zoom Chat series hosted by the American Legion Auxiliary – Department of Wisconsin. This session expands the Legion Family’s public relations strategy by introducing advanced engagement concepts, most notably the practice of “newsjacking,” while reinforcing disciplined social media usage, branding consistency, and mission-centered storytelling. The tone is both instructional and forward-looking, positioning PR not as optional promotion but as essential organizational leadership.

A central theme of this session is agility. While previous sessions emphasized unity, branding, and business partnerships, this presentation focuses on how the American Legion Family can respond strategically to real-time events. The concept of newsjacking is presented as a tactical communications tool—one that must be executed with speed, relevance, and reputational awareness. The session stresses that credibility is preserved when responsiveness aligns clearly with mission and values.

In addition to newsjacking, the presentation places strong emphasis on National Poppy Day promotion, social media optimization, visual storytelling, and measurable engagement. The session closes by reinforcing gratitude, collaboration, and ongoing education as the foundation for long-term PR success across the Legion, Auxiliary, Sons of the American Legion (SAL), and Riders.

## **PR Team Introduction**

- Led by Natalia Genovesi King (Department Chair), with Julie Deleeuw (presenting) and Jenna Smith on the committee, and Bob Shappell as Of Counsel.

## **Please Send Us YOUR Contact Information (Stay Informed!):**

- **Please send us the following:**

Name

District

Unit/Post/Squadron #

*\*State, if other than WI*

Email Address

## **Interested in Requesting a Visit?**

To request a visit from the Department President, Sue Hembrook, or from any Department Chairperson, please fill out the "Department President/Chairman Visit Request," which may be found at: [www.amlegionauxwi.org/forms](http://www.amlegionauxwi.org/forms)

## Stay Up To Date & Follow Us on Facebook

- **Web Address:** [www.facebook.com/groups/aladepartmentofwipr/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/aladepartmentofwipr/)
- **QR Code for Facebook Page:**



- While you are there, check out our post: **“Seven Days, Seven Ways to Serve & Inspire.”**

Let’s make our stories shine all week long. Each day has its own catchy theme. Pick one, snap a photo, and inspire others to support our veterans and communities.

## Have questions or feedback?

Share your thoughts on new topics, valuable takeaways, and how we can keep elevating ALA’s public relations impact. Let’s keep the momentum going and make every member’s engagement opportunity count.

## Introduction to Newsjacking

The presentation introduces “newsjacking” as a strategic communications technique in which an organization inserts itself into a trending news story to amplify visibility. The metaphor of “catching a wave” is used to illustrate the importance of timing.

Newsjacking requires:

- Speed of response.
- Brand alignment.
- Creativity.
- Authentic audience relevance.

The presentation includes examples of both successful and failed attempts, emphasizing that effectiveness depends on tone, timing, and appropriateness.

A historical marketing example referencing AT&T advertising around September 11 and a social media post by Southwest Airlines during a Seattle vs. Detroit NFL game are presented to prompt critical evaluation of ethical boundaries and brand sensitivity.

### **Serious Newsjacking Scenario: Cybersecurity Workforce Initiative**

A hypothetical application of newsjacking is explored through a real-world style example: a White House cybersecurity workforce initiative aimed at training 500,000 Americans.

The American Legion is positioned as uniquely qualified to respond by advocating for priority veteran access to cybersecurity training programs. The proposed messaging highlights veterans' experience in intelligence, defense, and mission-critical operations.

A sample response includes:

- A press release headline calling for veteran prioritization.
- An op-ed explaining why veterans are ideal cybersecurity candidates.
- Social media graphics.
- Media interviews with Legion spokespeople.
- Promotion of existing Legion workforce programs.

The strategy works because it:

- Aligns with national security and employment missions.
- Demonstrates authority.
- Requires no new program creation.
- Connects directly to veteran transition assistance.

## **Lighthearted Newsjacking Scenario: Viral Squirrel Story**

A humorous example involves a viral video of a squirrel stealing a donut from a police department desk. The proposed Legion response demonstrates how to leverage trending, harmless stories while maintaining professionalism.

The sample post humorously references the squirrel's "mission" and connects to community service themes without mocking individuals or trivializing serious matters.

This example illustrates:

- Humor is permissible when respectful.
- Non-political content can humanize the organization.
- Social media personality increases engagement.
- Mission alignment must remain intact.

## **Risks and Downsides of Newsjacking**

The presentation provides a candid analysis of risks:

- **Short shelf life:** News cycles move quickly.
- **Backlash potential:** Rushed responses can appear insensitive.
- **Timing sensitivity:** Delayed posts feel forced.
- **Misreading tone:** Cleverness may appear tone-deaf.
- **Reputational damage:** A single poor decision can undermine trust.

The guiding principle: if it does not clearly support the mission and values, do not engage.

## **Quick Newsjacking Guide for the Legion Family**

A seven-step tactical framework is provided:

1. Monitor relevant news topics affecting veterans and communities.
2. React immediately when the organization can add value.
3. Use pre-approved statements for rapid deployment.
4. Target journalists already covering the issue.
5. Remain selective and mission-focused.

6. Maintain a respectful, non-political tone.

7. Measure media and engagement impact.

This section translates theory into operational practice.

### **Poppy Day: Historical Context and Meaning**

The presentation transitions to National Poppy Day education. It recounts how red poppies flourished in European battlefields after World War I and gained symbolic significance through the poem *"In Flanders Fields"* by Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae.

On September 27, 1920, the poppy was adopted as the memorial flower of The American Legion Family. By 1924, nationwide distribution began. Today, the American Legion Auxiliary leads the Poppy Program.

Funds raised support veterans, active-duty service members, and their families through medical assistance, financial support, and commemorative programming.

### **Department Poppy Leadership**

We were joined by Kathy Grom, Department Poppy Chair. Her extensive leadership history within the Auxiliary and Riders reinforces program continuity and multilevel engagement within the Legion Family.

Her personal eligibility through her husband's Navy service and father's Army service emphasizes generational military connections.

Kathy shared her experience as the Poppy chair, highlighting the success of the Poppy program and the importance of public relations in raising awareness about its meaning. She discussed various PR tools used, including social media, press releases, and Poppy proclamations, and emphasized the impact of these efforts in promoting the program and engaging the community. Kathy also described the role of the Poppy Princess in local events and the effectiveness of swag bags and visual displays in promoting the program's message.

Kathy stressed the importance of understanding the meaning behind the poppy and sharing her granddaughter's experience as Little Miss Poppy. She offered to share resources and information with others interested in the program. She may be reached via email, and her information may be found on the PROGRAM page under the Poppy Program.

**Special Guest: Vice Commander Larry Larson**

Larry Larson, Vice Commander of the American Legion, is highlighted for his leadership background, including prior District Command, committee leadership roles, and membership growth achievements.

His leadership record underscores the connection between membership growth and strong public visibility.

Vice Commander Larson discussed the importance of veterans making poppies and shared his experience distributing them, noting that having both Legion and Auxiliary members present leads to higher donations. He also discussed training opportunities for making poppies and the positive reception when distributing them in various locations.

Vice Commander Larson explained the significance of Flanders Field and the Poppy as the American Legion's official flower, emphasizing the importance of educating younger veterans about its meaning. He expressed what the poppy flower's significance means to him, as a veteran, and reiterated what Poppy Chair Kathy stated earlier, that only through educating others on the meaning and history of the poppy can others begin to support Poppy Day and understand its significance.

**Special Guest: Department President Sue Hembrook**

President Sue has extensive experience with the Poppy Program, having run the Poppy Shop at the Milwaukee War Memorial for a number of years. She also shared the meaning of what each portion of the Poppy flower represents:

- **Red Petals:** Represent the heavy loss of life and the blood spilled on the battlefield.
- **Black Center:** Symbolizes the mourning of the families who have lost a loved one.
- **Green Stem:** Represents the hope for a future with peace and the regrowth of nature crops after the devastation of war.

President Sue confirmed that Poppy making classes are available for units/posts to request and that the Poppy making classes are offered at different times of the year, with the most recent being at Mid-Winter Conference.

### **Poppy Day Promotional Tools and Resources**

The presentation directs members to national and Department resources for banners, posters, coloring books, media templates, and official logos. These tools aim to standardize branding and simplify event promotion.

Members are encouraged to utilize the official Poppy Day logo and purchase materials through authorized channels to maintain brand consistency.

Media outreach options include pre-drafted press releases, PSA templates, and op-ed letters.

### **RESOURCES:**

<https://www.amlegionauxwi.org/poppyprogram>

<https://www.legion-aux.org/national-poppy-day>

## **Maximizing Social Media: Strategic Framework**

A detailed ten-point social media strategy is outlined:

1. Showcase community service.
2. Spotlight members.
3. Promote programs and events.
4. Share veteran resources.
5. Honor patriotic holidays.
6. Partner with local organizations.
7. Encourage interaction.
8. Use consistent branding.
9. Create short-form video.
10. Celebrate achievements.

Each category includes tactical examples and caption suggestions.

The emphasis remains on authenticity, visibility, and mission alignment.

## **Seven Ways to Strengthen the Legion Family Story Online**

A complementary framework reinforces storytelling principles:

- Honor and recognize volunteers.
- Share behind-the-scenes content.
- Highlight measurable impact.
- Tell individual stories.
- Use infographics.
- Build event momentum.
- Demonstrate gratitude through action.

The repeated messaging reinforces unity and shared identity across Legion, Auxiliary, SAL, and Riders.

# PROUD TO SERVE. UNITED TO INSPIRE.

## 7 WAYS TO STRENGTHEN THE AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY STORY ONLINE

### 1 Honor Those Who Serve — and Say Thank You!



Celebrate Legionnaires, Auxiliary members, Sons, and Riders who go above and beyond every day. Post a “Volunteer of the Month” or share a short video of appreciation, or spotlight members making a difference.

### 2 Show the Heart of the Mission — Go Behind the Scenes

Invite your followers to see what makes The American Legion Family thrive. Capture real, unfiltered moments — from event prep and brainstorming sessions,



### 3 Let the Numbers Tell the Story of Impact

Every statistic represents real lives touched. Share the numbers that matter — funds raised, veterans served, scholarships awarded, hours volunteered.



### 4 Bring Our Mission to Life Through Storytelling

Every member and every veteran has a story worth telling. Use photos, short videos, or written posts to highlight those stories — the faces, families, and journeys behind our cause.



## 5 Make Information Stand Out with Infographics

in a fast-moving feed, visuals capture attention. Use bold, patriotic graphics to share event details, community stats, or awareness messages. Simple, clean, and eye-catching designs help your message spread — amplifying the reach of The American Legion Family’s mission across social media.



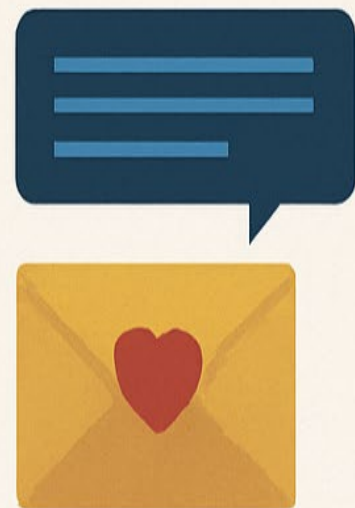
## 6 Rally the Legion Family Around Events and Campaigns

Events are where our shared purpose shines brightest. Build excitement with countdowns, “save the date” graphics, and campaign hashtags. Encourage members, posts, and units to share your event materials. Every repost, every share, and every comment strengthens our collective voice and unites us in service.



## 7 Show Appreciation — and Take Action

Thanking supporters isn’t just kind — it’s essential. Go beyond words; send handwritten notes, celebrate milestones, or respond personally to feedback. Each act of gratitude strengthens the bond between our mission and our members, proving that in The American Legion Family, no one serves alone.



## **Conclusion**

The final message reinforces that the Legion Family's credibility depends not only on historic service but on how effectively it communicates that service today. Through unity, preparation, gratitude, and strategic responsiveness, the American Legion Family remains visible, relevant, and mission-driven in a rapidly evolving communications environment.

## **Interactive Feedback and Engagement**

Participants are invited to provide feedback on new learnings, valuable takeaways, and desired future topics. This reinforces a culture of continuous improvement. We are excited to announce that the new PR Chair for 2026-27 will be Kristy Wakeman, Unit 208. She may be reached via email at [Kareuter19@gmail.com](mailto:Kareuter19@gmail.com) She welcomes your input, comments, suggestions, and questions.

## **Closing Remarks and Convention Invitation**

The PR Committee extends gratitude to participants and invites members to the July 15–19, 2026, convention in Appleton. <https://wilegion.org/department-convention>

## Fun Holidays for Social Media

Here's a fun and engaging way to celebrate each of these May holidays on social media:

- MAY 4 - STAR WARS DAY aka May The 4<sup>th</sup> Be With You – Ask your Legion Family and Community what their fave Star Wars movie is or for their fav Star Wars quote. #StarWarsDay & #MayThe4thBeWithYou
- MAY 5 - Lemonade Day– Host a Lemonade Stand at your Unit/Post or serve Lemonade during your meeting! #LemonadeDay
- MAY 13 – National Apple Pie Day – Serve Apple Pie during your meetings, ask your LLF and Community for Apple Pie recipes, and photos of them enjoying a slice. #ApplePieDay
- MAY 15 - International Day of the Family – Ask your LLF and Community to post photos of their families. #InternationalDayOfFamilies
- MAY 26 – National Blueberry Pie Day - Serve Blueberry Pie during your meetings, ask your LLF and Community for Blueberry Pie recipes, and photos of them enjoying a slice. #BlueberryPieDay
- MAY 28 – National Hamburger Day. Ask your LLF and local community for their favorite local hamburger establishment. Post photos of your LLF having a bite! #nationalhamburgerday

# AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

Dept. of WI PR Program

## Impactful Community Service

- Photos & Recap Videos
- Stories of Lives Touched



Helping Local Families

## Member Spotlights

- Weekly Profiles
- Veteran Stories



Honoring Our Members

## Promote Events

- Upcoming Activities
- Sign Up Today!



## Support Veterans

- VA Info & Resources
- Help for Homeless Vets



Serving Those Who Served

## Patriotic Posts

- Flag & Holiday Tributes



Remember & Honor

## Build Partnerships

- Community Outreach
- Thanking Sponsors



Working Together

## Ask & Engage

- Polls & Questions



## Videos & Achievements

- Short Clips & Milestones



Celebrating Success!

Proudly Serving Wisconsin Communities! ★ ★ ★