

11 August 2011

National League of Families Board of Directors, Family and Associate Members,

During the business meeting portion of the Annual Meeting, 23 July 2011, I raised a concern of mine that there was a person elected to the Board of Directors that wasn't eligible to be on the Board. I arrived at this conclusion by applying the current Bylaws of The National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Action to the voting member eligibility status of said Board Member.

In doing so, I didn't expect the reaction this inquiry elicited from board members and voting members alike. It was obvious from the tone of the board members that my concern was taken as a personal attack on a fellow board member and not a Point of Order dealing with the proper election of board members. I assure you that this was not my intent. My concern lies strictly in this organization's ability to correctly and consistently follow the Bylaws that have been agreed upon by The National League of Families.

As I stated in the business meeting, according to the Bylaws, a non-eligible person was elected to the Board of Directors:

In Article VI, Board of Directors, Section 2, paragraph 2:

"Voting members are entitled to be nominated as candidates for the board of directors."

In Article III, Members, Section 1, sub-section (a):

"A voting member is defined as any blood or legal relative who has reached the age of eighteen (18) of any American who is now or has been listed as captured or missing or otherwise unaccounted for from the Vietnam war, and returned prisoners of war from Southeast Asia, and who is in good standing with dues paid current."

The definition of "blood or legal relative" was the key point of contention in the discussion. The point was made that the board member in question was initially the sister-in-law of the missing family member. She has since been divorced and remarried. It is my contention that this severs the tie of being a "blood or legal relative." It was also revealed that she is the Primary Next of Kin (PNOK) and has Power of Attorney for the former family member's case.

I presented this case to an attorney who is involved in Contract Law and has a background in Family Law. The attorney reviewed the Bylaws of The National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Action. The attorney stated that once the board member in question remarried, the "blood or legal relative" status was severed. Also, the attorney explained that Primary Next of Kin (PNOK) status and Power of Attorney for the former family member's case does not qualify them as a "blood or legal relative." These are legal designations for a person to act on one's behalf in specific circumstances.

With all of this said, It was my contention that the board member in question could qualify as an Associate Member but not a Voting Member. The argument was then made by a board member that the National League of Families policy is, "once a voting member, always a voting member," regardless of circumstances (i.e. divorce/remarrying). This interpretation of what constitutes a Voting Member is nowhere in the Bylaws. Also, it is direct contradiction of past action of the National League of Families. There is past precedent where the National League of

Families has revoked MIA wives Voting Member status to Associate Member status when they remarried. This is also the policy of the Air Force Casualty Office. When my mother remarried in 1972, she was informed that she was no longer a "blood or legal relative." The authority to handle my father's case was relegated to his parents, my grandparents.

I would like to now address a response from a board member to a letter which addressed similar concerns:

Patty,

After reading your four page rant, I found it to be irrelevant, baseless and without merit. Please stop wasting our time. We have work to do.

V/R,

Mark Stephensen, Past Chairman, Current Treasurer

Board of Directors

National League of POW/MIA Families

This response concerns me because it is the duty of the Board of Directors to answer/remedy the legitimate questions and concerns of the National League of Families. Once this duty becomes a waste of time, we have a dysfunctional governing body. To coin a popular phrase; " You work for us." For a board member to just state that a letter of concern from a Family Member is "irrelevant, baseless and without merit" without justifying why, point by point, is inexcusable and beneath the dignity of a National League of Families board member.

From reading email discourse from other concerned people on this topic, I am not the only one who feels this way. In light of the legal opinions referenced in this document and other discourse, the National League of Families has seen credible evidence of the board of directors not adhering to the Bylaws of The National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Action. Also, it has seen credible evidence of past precedent being set to sever Voting Member status to wives who have remarried.

I believe that it is in everyone's best interest for the The National League of Families Board of Directors to take up this matter and resolve the issue at hand as soon as possible. This should entail the board of directors taking this issue to a neutral legal counsel. Said legal counsel should weigh in on the legality of the board member in question regarding whether or not her current marital status complies with the definition of "blood or legal relative" as the Bylaws are currently written. Further, legal counsel should provide the Board of Directors with what action(s) need to be taken in order to correct any violations found. Until then, the board member in question should either resign from her position or not be allowed to vote or take action in any National League of Families Board of Director votes until this issue is resolved.

This is not a matter that should be overlooked or marginalized. How this issue is handled, is a direct reflection on the National League of Families Board of Directors ability to govern and abide by the Bylaws they are obligated to uphold and rule in a consistent manner.

Sincerely,

Lawrence Echanis

Son, Maj Joseph Y. Echanis USAF

MIA / Laos