



Basic Training

“Full Documents”





History & Organization



”No one man can claim to be the founder of the American Legion”

– Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.

- Theodore Roosevelt Jr. envisioned as early as 1915 a national network of U.S. military veterans and skilled specialists who would be ready to serve in the event of war.
- The first American Legion was incorporated that year in the state of New York and grew to more than 25,000 members nationwide whose military and technical skills, as well as willingness to serve, were documented for potential wartime use.
- Roosevelt Jr. and several founders of the future American Legion were members. The administration declined the organization’s offer to help the federal government on its war preparedness program but took over the organization’s records for use by the Council of National Defense.
- The first American Legion was out of business in late 1916. But the idea was merely on hold. The American Legion name, Roosevelt Jr. later said, had earlier been coined by his father, in reference to U.S. citizens he had assembled who were qualified to serve in the military in case of emergency.



Paris Caucus, March 1919

- In late January 1919, Roosevelt Jr. and three other line officers of the American Expeditionary Forces met casually in Paris to discuss their imminent homecoming, the Bolshevik revolution and its threat to the United States, along with the need to form an organization of veterans specifically to help those who had served in the Great War.
- The four in attendance were Roosevelt Jr., Lt. Col. George S. White, Col. William Donovan and Maj. Eric Fisher Wood.
- Gen. John Pershing, commander of the AEF, later called a personal meeting with Roosevelt Jr. to discuss low morale among the troops still occupying postwar Europe. Roosevelt's solution was to call a morale-building conference in Paris, an event that would be the first caucus that gave birth to The American Legion. To set up the conference, Pershing authorized a meeting of 20 officers in mid-February 1919 and, following that, granted travel orders for the March gathering.
- Officers and enlisted personnel alike would be invited from their duty stations across Europe. The number of those in attendance is unknown. Only a fraction of those who came to Paris for the caucus signed attendance sheets.



St Louis Caucus, May 1919

- While other founders were organizing and running the Paris Caucus, Roosevelt Jr. returned to the United States to promote a follow-up gathering of veterans in St. Louis in May.
- At what would become known as the St. Louis Caucus May 8-10, 1919, **The American Legion's Constitution was drafted.**
- On Sept. 16, 1919, the fast-growing veterans organization received a federal charter from Congress.
- By the time of the first American Legion National Convention in Minneapolis in November, the organization numbered more than 684,000.





Lemuel Bolles, left, and Franklin D'Olier

- Franklin D'Olier of Pennsylvania was elected to serve as the first national commander, and Lemuel Bolles of Washington was appointed as the first national adjutant.
- Indianapolis won the bid in a competition with four other cities – Minneapolis, Detroit, Kansas City, Mo., and Washington, D.C. – to become the permanent home of The American Legion National Headquarters.
- In less than a year, The American Legion had emerged from an idea built on a few general values into a federally chartered and fast-growing force of patriotic veterans



Among the founding principles that have guided The American Legion since its birth include:

- Military rank in the service would be irrelevant for American Legion membership and officer positions.
- Wartime veterans who served stateside duty were eligible for membership.
- Gender and race were not to be considered for membership eligibility, nearly a year before women had the right to vote and 45 years before the Civil Rights Act was passed.
- Policies and positions of the organization would come from the grassroots level upward, through a resolution process designed to begin at the local post and move through the department and then to the National Executive Committee and/or National Convention.



The four pillars of American Legion service began to take shape under National Commander D'Olier's leadership:

- Veterans
- Defense
- Americanism
- Youth



The original National Headquarters building in Indianapolis

These words are now engraved on the limestone pillars of National Headquarters in Indianapolis



Foremost on the minds of the founders was the organization's need to help veterans and their families

- Those who fought in World War I had been exposed to combat tactics never before encountered. They faced chemical warfare in the trenches of Europe. Tanks, heavy artillery, air combat and machine guns had changed the face of war.
- Such innovations also produced new types of veteran disabilities. Those who survived the war often came home physically or mentally afflicted, frequently as a result of chemical warfare.
- The war also had created a massive number of widowed spouses and fatherless children. At the time, the U.S. government had no comprehensive health-care program to address the unique needs of service-disabled veterans, and the need for a unified system to treat them became profound.



Vocational training and employment assistance for veterans also were not available at the time.



- In short, federal benefits and health-care services for veterans and their families were scant, and Veterans Rehabilitation became a pillar value and urgent priority.
- One of the first organizations to address the problem, The American Legion immediately began reaching out to veterans and their families directly to help them understand what few government benefits they were due and how to apply for them



A precursor to the modern-day network of American Legion-accredited service officers that assists veterans today,

- a national American Legion War Risk Insurance Division helped thousands of veterans and their families file for disability claims, insurance payments and other benefits in the organization's earliest months.
- The Legion also offered vocational training for those whose ability to support their families had been compromised by physical or mental conditions related to military service.
- The American Red Cross provided financial assistance as the Legion established a service division, performing outreach through a fast-multiplying galaxy of local American Legion posts, and the era of the service officer began



American Legion youth programs began to take shape during the organization's first two decades

- Support for Boy Scouts of America, passed by resolution at the First American Legion National Convention in 1919, was the initial youth program officially sanctioned by the organization, which would go on to become the nation's largest non-denominational sponsor of Scouting units.
- American Legion Baseball was started in 1925 in South Dakota.
- American Legion Boys State was founded in 1935 in Illinois to counter a rising tide of subversive anti-American youth camps popping up across the country.
- In 1938, the National High School Oratorical Contest debuted as an American Legion program to instill leadership and knowledge of the U.S. Constitution
- Prominent past alumni of the Boys State and Boys Nation programs include former U.S. President William Clinton, Neil Armstrong, Alan Keyes, Lou Dobbs, Sam Nunn, Rush Limbaugh, Phil Jackson, Michael Jordan, Jon Bon Jovi, Samuel Alito, James Gandolfini, Bruce Springsteen, Richard Cheney, Tom Brokaw, Joseph Lieberman, Richard Lugar, Michael Dukakis, Scott Bakula and Chris Christie.



As a lobbying organization, The American Legion set in motion many reforms to provide compassionate care, benefits, training and support for veterans and their families.

- A survey conducted by the Legion in 1923 revealed that many veterans of the Great War had plummeted into homelessness and despair after discharge.
- Many suffered from puzzling mental illnesses known at the time as "shell shock" (today diagnosed as post-traumatic stress). As the 1920s unfolded, it was not uncommon to see blind, limbless or mentally ill former doughboys selling pencils and apples on street corners, just trying to survive.



The American Legion's relentless work on behalf of disabled veterans led to passage of the **World War Veterans Act of 1924**, linking military service to several classes of physical disability.

- The federal government's disorganized and often-corrupt collection of agencies to help veterans was consolidated first into the Veterans Bureau in 1921, which also became entangled in corruption, before services were greatly improved under the Legion-urged creation of the Veterans Administration in 1930. As the early VA took shape, The American Legion began fighting for adequate funding for the agency so it could provide quality care.
- Members of the Legion began volunteering in VA health-care facilities where they could provide firsthand oversight, adding credibility to their lobbying efforts.



The Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission of The American Legion became the most prominent stakeholder voice on all the service arms of the Veterans Administration that it helped create:



- Health care
- Pensions and benefits
- Education
- Homelessness prevention
- Employment opportunities
- Cemetery benefits



- On June 14, 1923, The American Legion's Americanism Commission led a conference in Washington bringing together no less than 68 other organizations, military groups, educators and others for the first of two national flag conferences that would lay the groundwork for U.S. Flag Code.
- President Warren G. Harding was the keynote speaker at the 1923 conference.
- By the time of the 1924 Flag Conference, 32 states had agreed to adopt the code for their schools after some adjustments were made.
- The American Legion would lobby Congress for the next 18 years to adopt into law U.S. Flag Code.



The American Legion Endowment Fund, established in 1925

- created the Temporary Financial Assistance program to provide financial support for minor children of eligible veterans.
- The fund was also dedicated to provide training and support for American Legion service officers.
- The TFA program was augmented in 1990 during Operation Desert Storm with the Family Support Network, which connected American Legion volunteers with military families in need of support during deployments.
- Renamed **The American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation** in 2018, the fund continues to support service officers and military/veteran families with children at home, who are facing emergency financial hardships.



- The nation's economic descent in the Great Depression presented profound challenges for veterans and their families. The Economy Act of 1933 threatened to unravel many of the Legion's hard-fought gains on behalf of disabled veterans and their families.
- On March 28, 1934, the Legion recorded one of its most significant victories ever by driving forward Public Law 141, which was vetoed by the president but later overridden by Congress, to protect disabled veterans and their benefits from federal budget cuts proposed under the Economy Act.
- That accomplishment on Capitol Hill not only preserved benefits for needy veterans and their families, it also firmly established The American Legion's might in Washington.



- In the decades to come, The American Legion's continuous efforts to improve the lives of veterans led to some of the most significant developments in U.S. society, most notably passage of the **Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944**, better known as the "**GI Bill**."
- The original language of the bill, written in longhand by American Legion Past National Commander Harry Colmery, was the cornerstone of a half-century of American prosperity after World War II.
- Millions of veterans received college educations, bought homes with affordable VA loans, and created what became the American middle class as the century's second half unfolded. Some have described the GI Bill as the nation's most significant social legislation of the 20th century.
- Through the years, The American Legion has fought to protect GI Bill benefits from federal budget cuts and to extend them to veterans seeking different types of educations after discharge, such as certification for trades, apprenticeships and online classes.



The post-World War II American Legion grew and expanded, reaching record membership of 3,326,556 in 1946 and adding 2,600 new posts in a 12-month period ending in January 1947

- The organization, fresh off of its success in getting the GI Bill passed, was well-positioned to ensure that the benefits promised in the legislation were fulfilled.
- Hundreds of new VA health-care facilities were built in the post-World War II era, and the Legion strongly urged a VA-medical school affiliation program to make sure those facilities were properly staffed and equipped; medical school affiliations flourished in the years that followed to strengthen VA hospitals and clinics.



During the Korean War, The American Legion fought to expand VA eligibility to all who had honorably served in the U.S. Armed Forces, not just those who served during wartime

- Along with that came the need to lobby for adequate VA funding, which proved to be a consistent and persistent battle for The American Legion over the decades to come.
- The **American Legion Child Welfare Foundation** was formed in 1954 to provide grant money for nonprofit organizations that serve to improve the lives of children and youth; the foundation now issues over \$600,000 a year to worthy organizations.
- The Legion also provides support for Special Olympics, Junior ROTC, high school rodeo, after-school tutoring and many other activities at the national, state and local levels.



- The Vietnam War era produced another new generation of eligible veterans in an organization that was designed to expire after those who fought in World War I were gone.
- Led by veterans of the first two world wars, The American Legion was positioned through the 1960s to stand for patriotism, flag respect and traditional values at a time of major social shifts in the nation, including strong public opposition to the war.
- Due to the Vietnam War, The American Legion pressed to the forefront two major developments in the treatment of veterans: proving the link between Agent Orange exposure and adverse health conditions suffered by veterans of the Vietnam War and gaining acceptance of post-traumatic stress disorder as a compensable VA condition and disability.
- The American Legion worked with Columbia University researchers to refute a federal study and conclusion finding no connection between Agent Orange and adverse health conditions of Vietnam War veterans.
- Also in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, The American Legion was instrumental in gaining diagnostic acceptance of PTSD, thus beginning a long and difficult journey in proper treatment for veterans confronting it.



The Citizens Flag Alliance

- A 5-4 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the 1989 case *Texas v. Johnson* defined deliberate desecration of the U.S. flag as a constitutionally protected act of free speech.
- The ruling led The American Legion to assemble the Citizens Flag Alliance, a collaboration of more than 140 organizations, to seek a constitutional amendment that would return to the states the power to enact and enforce laws to protect the flag from such acts.
- In nearly every session of Congress since 1990, The American Legion has pushed for passage of an amendment that would simply read: "The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States." In 2005, the measure came within one Senate vote of passing with the supermajority required for a constitutional amendment.



American Legion Riders

- In 1993, The American Legion Riders program was launched at Garden City, Mich., Post 396 to bring veteran motorcycle enthusiasts together.
- In the months and years that followed, the Legion Riders grew to more than 120,000 members and more than 2,200 chapters nationwide.
- The group is the driving fundraising force for the Legacy Scholarship program, which provides college money for the children of military men and women who lost their lives while serving on active duty or have a combined VA disability rating of 50 percent or greater assigned on or after Sept. 11, 2001.
- The main event of the group is the annual American Legion Legacy Run, which typically starts in Indianapolis and proceeds to the national convention city where Legacy Scholarship funds are delivered to the national commander.



- The terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, led to a surge in patriotism and support for those serving in the U.S. Armed Forces.
- The American Legion quickly went to work reviving the Blue Star Banner program, identifying homes with loved ones serving in the war.
- Within months of the attacks, The American Legion launched the Legacy Scholarship Fund to provide college scholarships to the children of military men and women who lost their lives on duty during or after the attacks; scholarship eligibility was later expanded to include the children of veterans with combined disability ratings of 50 percent or greater.
- The Legion lobbied vigorously against defense budget cuts as the war progressed and in 2005 passed Resolution 169 proclaiming the organization's support for the service members and their mission alike to defeat terrorism around the planet.
- In May 2014, American Legion National Commander Daniel Dellinger called for the resignation of VA's top officials amid a nationwide scandal where medical center directors were falsifying records and failing to make appointments for veteran patients, many of whom died waiting to see doctors. The call led to the resignation of VA Secretary Eric Shinseki and emergency legislation to improve accountability at VA and begin the restoration of trust among veterans. The American Legion conducted more than 20 Veterans Crisis Command Center and Veterans Benefit Center events and town hall meetings in the months following the scandal.



100 Years and Counting!

- The American Legion celebrated its 100th anniversary between August 2018 and November 2019.
- Thousands of state and local activities were conducted to honor the organization's first century of service.
- The motto of the centennial program was "Legacy & Vision" to concentrate both on the organization's many accomplishments of the past and its mission of the future as the post-9/11 generation of veterans began to assume leadership of the organization.
- The 101st American Legion National Convention was conducted in Indianapolis, home of American Legion National Headquarters.



Pandemic

- The COVID-19 pandemic, declared global in March 2020, set The American Legion in motion worldwide. Buddy Checks, blood donations, food-collection and distribution, procurement and delivery of personal protective equipment and more became community, state and national priorities during the crisis.
- The pandemic suspended plans for national youth program championships in 2020, as well as the 102nd American Legion National Convention, and for the first time in history, a national commander, James W. "Bill" Oxford of North Carolina, served a second term.
- The American Legion also launched a nationwide 100 Miles for Hope program to get American Legion Family members exercising during the pandemic and raise funds and awareness about the American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation.



The PACT Act

- Years of persistent advocacy on behalf of veterans exposed to poisons of burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as Agent Orange in locations previously unrecognized and atomic radiation at cleanup sites around the world led to the Aug. 10, 2022, signing into law of the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act.
- The American Legion-supported measure, most comprehensive contamination-relief package in history, stood to help some 3.5 million veterans of the Global War on Terrorism, along with others dating back to the Vietnam War.



Organization

- The range of opportunities in The American Legion can be linked to its organizational structure, which was established clearly and early to be democratic in nature, non-partisan and built from the grassroots up. In most cases, resolutions of the national organization start at the local post level, pass through the department and then are advanced through a commission for adoption by the National Executive Committee or the national convention.



Organization

- Posts, districts, departments and the national headquarters are composed of nearly identical commissions, committees and offices to address the diverse interests of the organization.
- The commander is the top elected official and spokesperson at each level; the adjutant is an appointed officer who handles day-to-day leadership.
- The officer corps also consists of a judge advocate, treasurer, sergeant at arms, historian and chaplain.



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    NEC[NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE  
One elected from each of the 55 departments,  
plus national commander, national vice commanders,  
and past national commanders  
(voice without vote)]
    NEC --> NJA[NATIONAL JUDGE ADVOCATE  
NATIONAL TREASURER  
NATIONAL CHAPLAIN  
NATIONAL HISTORIAN  
NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS  
Appointed by NEC]
    NEC --> NC[NATIONAL COMMANDER  
Elected by national convention]
    NEC --> NA[NATIONAL ADJUTANT  
Appointed by NEC]
    NEC --> FNC[FIVE NATIONAL VICE COMMANDERS  
Elected by national convention]
    NEC --> NHQ[NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS  
Full-time staff]
    NEC --> NCC[NATIONAL COMMISSIONS AND COMMITTEES  
(Standing) Appointed by NEC, and  
functioning on a continuing basis]
    NEC --> CCS[CONVENTION COMMITTEES AND SUBCOMMITTEES  
Composed of one delegate from each  
department, serving during the life of  
convention only]

    NHQ --> NHQ_Headquarters[National Headquarters  
700 N. Pennsylvania St., Indianapolis, IN  
Americanism Division  
Finance Division  
Media & Communications Division  
Internal Affairs & Membership Division  
National Convention & Meetings Division  
Marketing Division  
Human Resources  
Library and Museum  
Purchasing/Document Processing  
Information Technology Network Operations]
    NHQ --> NHQ_Operations[John H. Geiger Operations Center  
5745 Lee Road, Indianapolis, IN  
Emblem Sales  
Information Technology  
Print Production  
Board of Veterans Appeals]
    NHQ --> NHQ_DC[Washington, D.C., Office  
1608 K St. N.W., Washington, DC  
Veterans Employment & Education Division  
Legislative Division  
National Security Division  
Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation]

    NCC --> NCC_Americanism[Americanism Commission  
American Legion Baseball Committee  
Citizens Flag Alliance Advisory Committee  
Committee on Children & Youth  
Committee on Youth Education  
Youth Cadet Law Enforcement Committee  
Americanism Council]
    NCC --> NCC_Finance[Finance Commission  
American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, Inc  
The American Legion Endowment Fund Corp.  
Overseas Graves Decoration Trust]
    NCC --> NCC_InternalAffairs[Internal Affairs Commission  
American Legion Riders Advisory Committee  
Constitution & By-Laws Committee  
Membership & Post Activities Committee  
National Convention Resolutions  
Assignment Committee]
    NCC --> NCC_Legislative[Legislative Commission  
Legislative Council]
    NCC --> NCC_Marketing[Marketing Commission  
Emblem Committee]
    NCC --> NCC_Media[Media & Communications Commission  
Media & Communications Council]
    NCC --> NCC_NationalSecurity[National Security Commission  
Aerospace Committee  
Conventional Armed Forces Committee  
Foreign Relations Committee  
Law and Order & Homeland Security Committee  
Military Benefits & Quality of Life Committee  
National Guard & Reserve Forces Committee  
Unconventional Forces & Intelligence Committee  
National Security Council]
    NCC --> NCC_Veterans[Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission  
Health Administration Committee  
National Cemetery Committee  
TBI/PTSD Suicide Prevention Committee  
Veterans Benefits Committee  
Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Council  
Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Executive  
Committee]
    NCC --> NCC_VeteransEmployment[Veterans Employment & Education Commission  
Employment & Veterans Preference Committee  
Veterans Education, Other Benefits &  
Homelessness Committee  
Veterans Employment & Education Council]

    CCS --> CCS_Americanism[Americanism (1 delegate)  
Children & Youth (1 delegate)]
    CCS --> CCS_Constitutional[Constitutional Amendments (1 delegate)]
    CCS --> CCS_Credentials[Credentials & Rules (1 delegate)]
    CCS --> CCS_Finance[Finance (1 delegate)]
    CCS --> CCS_InternalAffairs[Internal Affairs  
Membership (1 delegate)  
Other Internal Matters (1 delegate)]
    CCS --> CCS_Legislation[Legislation (1 delegate)]
    CCS --> CCS_NationalSecurity[National Security  
Aerospace (1 delegate)  
Conventional Armed Forces (1 delegate)  
Foreign Relations (1 delegate)  
Law and Order & Homeland Security  
(1 delegate)  
Military Benefits & Quality of Life (1 delegate)  
National Guard & Reserve Forces (1 delegate)  
Unconventional Forces & Intelligence  
(1 delegate)]
    CCS --> CCS_VeteransAffairs[Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation  
Health Administration (1 delegate)  
National Cemetery (1 delegate)  
Veterans Benefits (1 delegate)]
    CCS --> CCS_VeteransEmployment[Veterans Employment & Education  
Employment & Veterans Preference  
(1 delegate)  
Veterans Education, Other Benefits &  
Homelessness (1 delegate)]
  
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NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
One elected from each of the 55 departments,
plus national commander, national vice commanders,
and past national commanders
(voice without vote)

**NATIONAL JUDGE ADVOCATE
NATIONAL TREASURER
NATIONAL CHAPLAIN
NATIONAL HISTORIAN
NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS**
Appointed by NEC

NATIONAL COMMANDER
Elected by national convention

NATIONAL ADJUTANT
Appointed by NEC

FIVE NATIONAL VICE COMMANDERS
Elected by national convention

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
Full-time staff

National Headquarters
700 N. Pennsylvania St., Indianapolis, IN
Americanism Division
Finance Division
Media & Communications Division
Internal Affairs & Membership Division
National Convention & Meetings Division
Marketing Division
Human Resources
Library and Museum
Purchasing/Document Processing
Information Technology Network Operations

John H. Geiger Operations Center
5745 Lee Road, Indianapolis, IN
Emblem Sales
Information Technology
Print Production
Board of Veterans Appeals

Washington, D.C., Office
1608 K St. N.W., Washington, DC
Veterans Employment & Education Division
Legislative Division
National Security Division
Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

NATIONAL COMMISSIONS AND COMMITTEES
(Standing) Appointed by NEC, and
functioning on a continuing basis

Americanism Commission
American Legion Baseball Committee
Citizens Flag Alliance Advisory Committee
Committee on Children & Youth
Committee on Youth Education
Youth Cadet Law Enforcement Committee
Americanism Council

Finance Commission
American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, Inc
The American Legion Endowment Fund Corp.
Overseas Graves Decoration Trust

Internal Affairs Commission
American Legion Riders Advisory Committee
Constitution & By-Laws Committee
Membership & Post Activities Committee
National Convention Resolutions
Assignment Committee

Legislative Commission
Legislative Council

Marketing Commission
Emblem Committee

Media & Communications Commission
Media & Communications Council

National Security Commission
Aerospace Committee
Conventional Armed Forces Committee
Foreign Relations Committee
Law and Order & Homeland Security Committee
Military Benefits & Quality of Life Committee
National Guard & Reserve Forces Committee
Unconventional Forces & Intelligence Committee
National Security Council

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission
Health Administration Committee
National Cemetery Committee
TBI/PTSD Suicide Prevention Committee
Veterans Benefits Committee
Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Council
Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Executive
Committee

Veterans Employment & Education Commission
Employment & Veterans Preference Committee
Veterans Education, Other Benefits &
Homelessness Committee
Veterans Employment & Education Council

CONVENTION COMMITTEES AND SUBCOMMITTEES
Composed of one delegate from each
department, serving during the life of
convention only

Americanism (1 delegate)
Children & Youth (1 delegate)

Constitutional Amendments (1 delegate)

Credentials & Rules (1 delegate)

Finance (1 delegate)

Internal Affairs
Membership (1 delegate)
Other Internal Matters (1 delegate)

Legislation (1 delegate)

National Security
Aerospace (1 delegate)
Conventional Armed Forces (1 delegate)
Foreign Relations (1 delegate)
Law and Order & Homeland Security
(1 delegate)
Military Benefits & Quality of Life (1 delegate)
National Guard & Reserve Forces (1 delegate)
Unconventional Forces & Intelligence
(1 delegate)

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
Health Administration (1 delegate)
National Cemetery (1 delegate)
Veterans Benefits (1 delegate)

Veterans Employment & Education
Employment & Veterans Preference
(1 delegate)
Veterans Education, Other Benefits &
Homelessness (1 delegate)



Organization Flow

- The American Legion primarily consists of three separate but interconnected entities: posts, state departments and a national headquarters. Departments have authority to create and charter intermediate groups, which may be referred to as districts, counties, divisions or zones, between the posts and departments. In no event may they invade the prerogatives vested within the post, department or national organization.
- **At the post level, committees typically include, but are not limited to:**
 - Americanism
 - Children & Youth
 - Education and Employment
 - Finance
 - House
 - Legislative
 - Membership & Post Activities
 - Public Relations
 - Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
 - Security
 - Graves Registration
 - Sons of The American Legion



Organization Flow Cont'd

- Post committees report and recommend directives and initiatives to elected post officers who then report and recommend them to the Post Executive Committee.
- The Post Executive Committee reports to, works with, and provides directives to the post commander, an elected officer, and the post adjutant, an appointed officer, and to the post as a whole.
- Posts provide information and coordinate efforts with district/county leadership.
- District/county officers, such as district commanders and district executive committees, coordinate, inform and work with posts in specific geographic regions. They then inform and coordinate with department headquarters.
- Departments, also composed of committees and officers, coordinate and work with National Headquarters, which also consists of commissions and committees with specific roles and purposes, an elected national commander and vice commanders, and appointed officers. The National Executive Committee (NEC) is the equivalent to a board of directors of the national organization. The NEC and the National Convention (similar to a stockholders meeting) are uniquely responsible for national resolutions decisions.



At the national level, the commander appoints chairpersons to lead commissions, including:

- Americanism
- Convention
- Finance
- Internal Affairs
- Legislative
- Marketing
- Media & Communications
- National Security
- Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
- Veterans Employment & Education



The national commissions oversee committees, task forces, councils and divisions.

Commissions are authorized to draft and submit resolutions to the National Executive Committee.

- The Legion's resolutions:
 - Establish positions
 - Formalize contracts
 - Chart the organization's course
 - Set policy
 - Sanction relationships
- The National Executive Committee meets in May, within 24 hours before and after each national convention, and within 45 days following the adjournment of the national convention.
- The same organizational format is mirrored at the department and district levels. At the post level, chairpersons are more commonly assigned to run programs, like Membership, Boys State, Oratorical Contest or American Legion Baseball, depending on the size and interests of the post.



The American Legion Resolution Process

- Resolutions of The American Legion can begin at any level of the organization. They may advance to the next level depending on the nature of the subject addressed.
- A post resolution may stay within the post or advance to the district/county or department. A resolution may advance from the department to the national level for consideration after approval by the Department Executive Committee or the Department Convention.
- Departments, after approval by the DEC or the Department Convention, may then forward approved resolutions for consideration at the national level.
- A department resolution may be advanced to a national standing commission or committee for consideration, followed by review of the National Executive Committee's Subcommittee on Resolutions, prior to consideration by the National Executive Committee. All fiscal matters of national effect, excluding dues, must come before the National Executive Committee. Changes in national dues must come before the National Convention.
- Department resolutions that call for consideration by the National Convention must be reviewed by the Resolutions Assignment Committee and, following that, approved by the appropriate National Convention Committee before reaching the National Convention floor for a vote.
- The National Convention considers resolutions once a year. It is the only body that can set dues or amend the national constitution. Resolutions can originate in the departments, national convention committees or the National Executive Committee for consideration by the National Convention.



- Each American Legion post and department is an autonomous nonprofit organization with the ability to set dues, determine priorities and operate programs that best meet the needs of its state or community. For instance, the Department of Wyoming has a leadership role in the state's high-school rodeo program, and the Department of Montana operates a program to install white crosses alongside highways where traffic fatalities have occurred. These specific interests require their own organizational structures, to go along with the standard committees of the Legion.
- The founders of The American Legion were crystal clear that the national headquarters, a separately incorporated nonprofit organization, would not dictate orders to departments, districts and posts.



The Emblem

The rays of the sun



The rays of the sun form the background of our proud emblem and suggests the Legion's principles will dispel the darkness of violence and evil.

The wreath



The wreath forms the center, in loving memory of those brave comrades who gave their lives in the service of the United States that liberty might endure.

The star



The star, victory symbol of World War I, also symbolizes honor, glory and constancy. The letters "U.S." leave no doubt as to the brightest star in the Legion's star.



The Emblem

Outer rings



The larger of two outer rings stands for the rehabilitation of our sick and disabled comrades. The smaller inside ring denotes the welfare of America's children.

Inner rings



The smaller of two inner rings set upon the star represents service to our communities, states and the nation. The larger outer ring pledges loyalty to Americanism.

American Legion



The words American Legion tie the whole together for truth, remembrance, constancy, honor, service, veterans affairs and rehabilitation, children and youth, loyalty, and Americanism.





Veterans Affairs
& Rehabilitation



Mission:

"The natural spokesman for the disabled veteran, his first friend and advocate, is his veterans organization."

Richard Seeyle Jones, "A History of The American Legion," 1946



Mission

- The American Legion has helped millions of families navigate the complicated and ever-changing world of veterans benefits through the years. Benefits come in many forms: government compensation for service-connected disabilities, VA health care, the GI Bill, career opportunities, pensions, funeral honors and survivor support are just a few.
- The gamut can run from the moment a member of the U.S. Armed Forces is faced with questions about military discharge to the assistance a surviving spouse receives after a funeral with honors.
- Every step of the journey, The American Legion is there to help veterans and their families.



Mission

- The active-duty Marine recovering from a traumatic brain injury at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center looks to the Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation staff for guidance in his new and greatly changed life.
- The Korean War veteran whose service-connected hearing loss has grown worse with age looks to his American Legion service officer to see how to change his disability rating.
- The disabled Iraq war veteran turns to an American Legion-sponsored business workshop to learn how to bid for a federal contract.
- A grieving family's right to privacy during the funeral of a loved one killed in action is protected by members of The American Legion Riders.
- One of The American Legion's four pillars of service, Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation, represents the fundamental constituency of the organization, and their welfare is promoted at the local, state and national levels.
- The Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission and the Veterans Employment & Education Commission lead the Legion's efforts in veterans benefits and transition assistance.



Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation (VA&R)

- The VA&R Commission's purpose is twofold:
- Provide oversight, guidance and support for an effective Department of Veterans Affairs
- Assist veterans as they pursue their benefits



The Legion's Veterans Employment & Education Commission focuses on:

- Veteran employment and business opportunities
- Education benefits
- Veteran homelessness



- Both the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation and Veterans Employment & Education commissions work closely with the Legislative Commission and staff in Washington, D.C., and throughout the nation, to keep veterans benefits and transition high on the legislative agenda.
- The VA&R, Veterans Employment & Education and Legislative commissions work together to convert Legion resolutions into laws and policies that aim to live up to Abraham Lincoln's timeless call to action in the aftermath of the Civil War, "to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and orphan."



Areas of Service

- The American Legion works every day to fulfill the spirit of Lincoln's words.
- Among the ways are:
 - Benefits assistance
 - Veterans health care
 - Employment and business
 - Education
 - Help for homeless veterans
 - Death benefits and cemetery administration



Benefits Assistance

- The American Legion supports a nationwide network of accredited representatives trained and certified to help veterans and their families understand, seek and obtain government benefits they are eligible to receive.
- While free-of-charge American Legion service-officer assistance largely focuses on VA claims, it also includes counseling on education programs, VA health-care eligibility, employment and business opportunities, pensions, and survivor benefits.
- Accredited representatives may be paid employees at state, county and city levels; American Legion post service officers are most often dedicated volunteers trained to provide effective referral services at the local level.
- Local post service officers work on more than 160,000 cases per year, always free of charge to the veterans and families they help. American Legion-certified department service officers operated throughout the country at the city, county and state levels, also free of charge, to help veterans receive the benefits they are due.



Benefits Assistance

- The American Legion conducts two national service officer schools annually to educate the network on an ever-changing landscape of laws, regulations and policies that affect veterans and their families.
- The schools also offer opportunities to share best practices and learn from Legion-contracted legal and medical consultants who specialize in veterans benefits. Nationwide, there are approximately 3,000 American Legion-accredited service officers.
- The American Legion National Headquarters also employs a team of staff experts to provide free representation in cases that go before the U.S. Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA) in Washington D.C. and Indianapolis. That representation is available to veterans and families disputing VA decisions.
- The Legion's BVA staff helps veterans document their cases, work through the appeals process and make arguments before the board. American Legion staff experts also provide assistance when cases move to the next level: the U.S. Court of Veterans Appeals for Veterans' Claims.
- The American Legion National Headquarters also maintains offices in Philadelphia, Milwaukee, and St. Paul, Minn., where assistance is provided to veterans and their families from across the country when they have issues involving veterans pensions, VA life insurance and debt management.



Benefits Assistance

- The American Legion's Regional Office Action Review (ROAR) investigative team conducts site visits at VA regional offices where claims are processed in order to gauge success, monitor efficiency and collect information to help the Veterans Benefits Administration reduce its backlog of unresolved cases. The site visits by these quality review teams are conducted by VA&R professional staff members at the state and national levels.
- The American Legion's national website offers a searchable database of service officers to help veterans find qualified assistance near them.
- legion.org/serviceofficers



Veterans Health Care

- The Department of Veterans Affairs manages the largest health-care system in the United States, providing medical treatment at 152 VA Medical Centers and approximately 1,400 outpatient sites of care of varying complexity, serving more than 9 million veterans each year.
- To ensure the VA health-care system has resources to meet the needs of veterans enrolling in the system, The American Legion's System Worth Saving (SWS) Task Force was established in 2003, when more than 300,000 veterans were waiting 30 days or longer for primary-care doctor appointments at VA medical facilities nationwide.
- In response to the overloaded system, VA suspended enrollments of new patients in Priority Group 8, no more than seven years after eligibility was expanded to open VA care to all honorably discharged veterans, regardless of income or health condition.
- At the same time, VA was calling for the closure of no fewer than seven medical centers around the country. The combination of high patient demand and plans to reduce the number of facilities led the Legion to establish the SWS program



Veterans Health Care

- "Throughout America, it is obvious VA health-care operations are trying to do more with less," then-National Commander Ronald F. Conley wrote in the first SWS report. "Demand has soared, and funding has failed miserably to keep up."
- Since that first year, when demand and access were the biggest issues facing VA health care, the program has evolved to tackle a broad range of veterans health-care issues, including:
 - Accessibility for veterans in rural areas
 - Excessive outsourcing
 - Adequate treatment for women veterans
 - Sanitization of medical equipment
 - Programs for veterans with post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury
 - Timely budgets



Veterans Health Care

- The SWS Task Force, which is composed of national staff and volunteer American Legion leaders, collects information from site visits and surveys and produces an annual System Worth Saving report for Congress, VA and the White House.
- Adequate funding for VA's constellation of health-care facilities nationwide is a continuous challenge for The American Legion, which has successfully fought for budget increases in recent years to meet growing patient demand.
- The Legion also won "advance appropriations" for VA health care so that VA medical facilities are provided the resources they need regardless of when the federal government passes its budget.
- Since 2003, The American Legion's System Worth Saving Task Force has conducted site visits across the nation at VA medical facilities to assess the quality and timeliness of veterans health care and to provide feedback from veterans on their level of care.



Veterans Health Care

- The Legion's support of a well-funded, fully staffed health-care system extends to nursing-home care for veterans and their families, the VA Vet Center program for veterans dealing with personal or mental-health issues, and domiciliaries for those battling substance abuse or homelessness.
- Members of The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion also provide essential volunteer hours at VA health-care facilities. More than 29,000 American Legion members are certified participants in the VA Volunteer Services program.
- The Legion also raises more than \$2 million a year to help VA hospitals and clinics in local communities.



VA Voluntary Service

- In April 1946, The American Legion was joined by contemporaries from other veterans organizations at an historic meeting with Veterans Administration officials in Washington, D.C. Participants recommended approval of an ambitious plan that called for community volunteer activities on behalf of veterans using VA health care facilities.
- The plan evolved into the VA Voluntary Service program, in which some 140,000 volunteers give more than 11 million hours in service to America's veterans a year. The American Legion annually provides more than 7,000 volunteers who spend more than 700,000 hours at VA facilities each year.



Traumatic Brain Injury and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- The American Legion has worked since its founding on behalf of men and women who have come home psychologically altered by their military experiences. The "shell shock" of World War I and "battle fatigue" of World War II ultimately gave way to post-traumatic stress disorder, a condition poorly understood and rarely treated until years after the Vietnam War ended. Thousands of service members have returned from Afghanistan and Iraq with traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which have been called the "signature wounds" of the war on terrorism.
- In Fall 2010, The American Legion convened a committee to study TBI/PTSD and the way in which the federal government is treating veterans diagnosed with these conditions. A three-part series in The American Legion Magazine (September, October, and November 2011) demonstrated how TBI and PTSD can affect every family differently and that no magic bullet exists for treatment. In 2012, the TBI/PTSD Work Group was elevated to committee status and in 2015, the committee was realigned under the VA&R Commission.
- The committee's work continues to evolve, urging increased focus on alternative treatments for veterans with PTSD and TBI, including equine therapy, hyperbaric oxygen treatment, cannabis research and the use of service dogs, among others. The committee later added suicide prevention among veterans to its mission.



Employment and Business

- The American Legion's Veterans Employment & Education Commission focuses on the transition from military service to civilian careers. Vital to this work are relationships with entities offering programs to help veterans prosper in the nation they swore to defend, including:
- Military.com (and its parent company, the online job-placement company Monster.com)
- Avue Technologies (an online service for veterans seeking careers in the federal government)
- Department of Labor
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- Small Business Administration
- The Lumina Foundation



Employment and Business

- Through such relationships, The American Legion promotes and conducts hundreds of veteran job fairs and career expos every year across the nation. In many communities, Legion posts host job fairs of their own. These events commonly attract up to 100 veteran-friendly employers and hundreds of job seekers.
- The Veterans Employment & Education Commission's Employment Committee guides the organization's policy on jobs, business development, education, housing, transition assistance and other matters.
- The commission's Veterans Preference Committee focuses on federal employment rights and laws, including compliance with the Veterans Preference Hiring Act.



Employment and Business

- The American Legion's Small Business Task Force is a consortium of successful veteran entrepreneurs from around the country. Working in support of Veterans Employment & Education Commission resolutions, the task force:
- Lobbies Congress to make federal contracts more easily available to businesses owned by service-disabled veterans.
- Provides mentorship to, and assists, veterans with their entrepreneurial dreams through training conferences and workshops.
- Pushes for compliance with a federal law mandating that service-disabled veterans receive no less than 3 percent of all federal contracts, a mark that has yet to be hit.
- Works with industry to seek ways to convert military training experience into credits for licenses and credentials in specialized career fields.



Education

- The Veterans Employment & Education Commission also provides national leadership in veterans education services, including the modernization of a GI Bill that better meets the needs of the 21st-century veteran.
- In 2008, Veterans Employment & Education Division staff in Washington, D.C., worked closely with Congress to craft the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which has been modified several times since its 2009 enactment to better cover the true costs of higher education.
- The Legion continuously works with VA and Congress to ensure that GI Bill benefits meet the needs of today's veterans and adequately cover the costs. The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017, named for the American Legion past national commander who was the principle architect of the original 1944 legislation, made further improvements to the benefits program.
- The Veterans Employment & Education Commission conducts student veteran panel discussions to determine ways in which campuses can better assist veteran students and their families. Such primary research allows the Legion to prioritize concerns when testifying before Congress and working with VA



Homelessness

- At the national level, The American Legion Veterans Employment & Education Commission works closely with VA to shape programs that aim to eliminate veteran homelessness. The Legion's successful advocacy on behalf of America's homeless veterans depends on state and local initiatives.
- In Pennsylvania, for instance, American Legion Housing for Homeless Veterans, Inc., provides housing and job-training opportunities for those in need.
- In many states, the Legion conducts or participates in homeless veteran stand-downs to provide services for those who have fallen on tough times. Other American Legion posts have built shelters for homeless veterans or sent volunteers to missions where help is needed.



Death Benefits and Cemetery Administration

- Among the values Legionnaires cherish most is remembrance of fallen comrades.
- In addition to ongoing efforts in Washington to protect VA benefits for spouses and children of deceased military personnel and veterans, the Legion serves as the conscience of a nation regarding final resting places.
- Across the country – and beyond – Legionnaires volunteer countless hours at state, national and overseas military cemeteries.
- The American Legion's Overseas Graves Decoration Trust Fund supplies free U.S. flags for all graves at cemeteries under the administration of the American Battle Monuments Commission in Europe.
- The Legion also has battled efforts to commercialize military and veteran burial grounds and has filed legal opinions opposing restrictions on the religious expressions of families during funeral services.
- At the local level, uniformed American Legion honor guards participate in thousands of funerals for veterans and military personnel every year.





National
Security



"The story of American wars is one of gallant deeds and great personal courage on the part of the individual officers and soldiers, but lack of preparation and training has always led to undue loss of life and heavy financial burdens ... As to the World War, I firmly believe that a substantial condition of preparedness of our land and naval forces, backed by an adequate merchant marine, would have kept us out of the war and would have placed us in a position to have brought it to an early termination."

- Gen. John Pershing, writing in 'The American Legion Weekly' magazine,
1922



Overview

- The American Legion's commitment to strong national security dates back to the organization's founding. In August 1919, as the Legion was still establishing its identity and chartering its first posts, its national headquarters began soliciting service members and veterans "conversant on military affairs ... to discuss the future military policy of the U.S." Legionnaires, perhaps by virtue of their world travels in uniform, also spoke up and took positions on foreign issues.
- The Legion's commitment to this pillar interest of the organization began to take clear shape in 1929 when two committees – Military Affairs and Aeronautics – were consolidated into one National Security Committee. That committee grew to its present-day form, as a full commission, by action of the National Executive Committee in 1947 and the 1948 national convention.
- The arrival of The American Legion's National Security Commission coincided with the creation of the Department of Defense and the departments of the Army, Navy and Air Force. The commission's purpose has always centered on a well-funded and resourced military, quality of life for those in service, and adequate benefits for military retirees. The commission also addresses issues related to border security, disaster control, support for the National Guard and reserve components, and other protections veterans wish to ensure for the greater public.



Specific aspects of the national security pillar include:

- A well-funded, well-equipped and well-trained military
- Awareness and surveillance of rogue nations, terrorist groups and global threats to U.S. security around the world
- Support for the Department of Homeland Security, and protection of U.S. borders, ports and other points of access
- Comprehensive disaster preparedness
- Quality of life issues for troops and their families – active-duty and reserve components alike – including compensation, benefits, health care, child care and family-support programs, and an efficient and compassionate healing and transition program for wounded and ill warriors
- Transition assistance for personnel moving from the military to VA health-care systems, including discharge review, medical and physical evaluation board advocacy, representation during the medical discharge process, employment counseling, education benefits and training
- Support for military retiree benefits, including TRICARE and TRICARE For Life
- Collaboration with DoD and VA to provide wounded warriors local support



The National Security Commission has seven standing committees:

- Aerospace
 - Conventional Armed Forces
 - Foreign Relations
 - Law and Order & Homeland Security
 - Military Benefits & Quality of Life
 - National Guard & Reserve Forces
 - Unconventional Forces & Intelligence.
-
- With more than 200 members, The American Legion's National Security Council lists as one of its primary responsibilities the monitoring of issues associated with military force strength. Included within that responsibility are qualifications for service in an all-volunteer force capable of maintaining the world's strongest, most skilled and efficient military.



National Security Commission

- When members of the National Security Council identify a problem they would like addressed, they inform members of the National Security Commission, which recommends action to the NEC.
- The National Security Commission and members of its specialized committees meet four times each year: immediately before the annual national convention; during the Washington Conference, usually in March; and twice in conjunction with the spring and fall National Executive Committee meetings in Indianapolis.
- During pre-convention meetings and again during the Washington Conference, military and civilian dignitaries brief the commission and committee members on the latest developments in U.S. national security.
- During the meetings, commission and committee members commonly visit military installations to meet with commanding officers, troops and contractor



National Security Division

- National Security Division staff work out of the Legion's Washington office, where military-affairs experts have proximity to authorities in the Pentagon, Congress and the White House. National Security staff lobbyists testify before Congress in support of American Legion resolutions and work closely with each branch of the U.S. Armed Forces in an effort to stay well informed about issues that affect personnel, military families and retirees.
- The work of the National Security Commission, its standing committees, the National Security Council, and division staff is mirrored at the local level by American Legion posts that conduct visits at military installations, adopt deployed units, provide support for military families and elevate public awareness about the honorable nature of military service.



Homeland Security

- The threat of terrorist attacks and natural catastrophes in the United States came painfully to light on Sept. 11, 2001, and during the devastating hurricane season of 2005.
- The American Legion works closely with government at all levels to improve disaster readiness in local communities and, at the national level, to ensure that a well-funded and efficient Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is prepared for any contingency.
- Since the DHS' creation following 9/11, The American Legion has supported its intent, purpose and arrangement: to harmonize multiple agencies, offices, businesses, community groups and others with readiness plans and quick-response capabilities.
- The Legion concurs with the DHS mission to coordinate domestic security, including effective customs operations, increased security of the border and aggressive drug interdiction.
- At the local level, American Legion posts commonly serve as disaster shelters in times of crisis, working closely with local and state emergency-management and homeland security authorities.
- Posts can provide vital backup and assistance to local VA medical centers and play active roles in their emergency-services programs. Legion posts also build public awareness every September with events and activities that support National Disaster Preparedness Month.
- Many posts take this opportunity to invite fire, police and emergency management officials to speak and provide information, as well as to build support for local Citizen Corps volunteerism.



Quality of Life for Troops, Retirees and Military Families

- Those who have chosen to serve in uniform, and those who make careers of military service, deserve a decent quality of life while they are in service and after they retire. This core belief of The American Legion drives many of its national security positions.
- Adequate base housing, family support, pay, insurance and health care for members of U.S. military all fit into the Legion's quality-of-life interests. The Legion is also a strong supporter of earned benefits and quality care for military retirees.
- The American Legion fights for the protection of military retirement benefits when Congress threatens to reduce them. The Legion also defends the current military-retirement system and opposes government efforts to change it.
- The organization supports ending the "disabled veterans tax," which requires some military retirees to forfeit pension pay in order to receive VA disability compensation, on a dollar-for-dollar basis.
- DoD pensions and VA disability compensation come from separate budgets and have separate purposes, so the Legion's position is that retirees are eligible to receive both if they qualify for both.
- The American Legion opposes increased enrollment fees or co-payment hikes for TRICARE coverage, the health-care program for servicemembers, military retirees and their families, and insists that coverage should be made permanent for members of the reserve components.



Blood Donor Program

- Nationwide, nearly 50,000 veterans a year donate some 80,000 units of blood through the Legion's Blood Donor Program. The Legion works with American Red Cross and community blood banks to ensure enough is available for ordinary use, military use and in the event of a natural disaster.
- The American Legion's Blood Donor Program has officially existed since 1942, and each year, the national commander recognizes American Legion departments that donate the most blood, based on five different membership size categories.
- While the Legion's Blood Donor Program has been a mainstay in communities nationwide since World War II, it became extremely important in the aftermath of 9/11 and continues to provide vital contributions during the war on terrorism.



Foreign Relations

- Closely associated with The American Legion's National Security Commission is its Foreign Relations Committee, first authorized as a committee in 1940. It became a full commission by action of the 1948 national convention. It was reverted back to a committee in 2014.
- The Foreign Relations Committee and National Security Commission often meet together at national gatherings and work toward similar goals. The Foreign Relations Committee focuses on diplomacy and has a long-standing relationship with the Department of State.
- Assigned to the Foreign Relations Committee is the Foreign Relations Council, whose purpose is to advance the Legion's foreign-relations principles and interests and "serve as a medium of disseminating and understanding" those principles through departments and posts of The American Legion, and through affiliated organizations.
- The American Legion's role in influencing U.S. foreign policy is based on the concept that no citizen has a better understanding about global threats and opportunities than one who has served his or her country in uniform outside the United States.
- The Foreign Relations Committee also works closely with U.S. and international authorities to repatriate all military personnel missing in action or held as prisoners of war.



How do I fit in?

- As federal budget deficit problems persist, Legionnaires will be called upon to voice their opposition to military spending cuts that could threaten national security and to initiatives that could erode the value of military benefits and retirement.
- Legionnaires can help by writing, calling and emailing their elected officials and by making themselves available for media to share The American Legion position on the need to maintain a strong national defense, including the protection of benefits for those who choose military careers.
- American Legion posts make positive impacts in the lives of military personnel and their families through firsthand connections. An important post relationship is with an installation's Family Readiness Group. It is vital for such relationships to start early, before deployment, and continue as long as they are needed.
- Legionnaires can also help members of the armed forces and their families by serving as community supporters, particularly in the area of transition assistance.
- Whether it's testimony on Capitol Hill in support of TRICARE benefits, adoption of a deployed National Guard unit or providing volunteer help for military families with deployed loved ones, The American Legion's national security pillar has many services, programs and qualities that aim to keep the United States free and safe, in a position of strength and stability.





Americanism



There can be no nation without citizens. And if America is to remain a mighty nation, then it must operate as one built on citizenship rather than population alone. The founders of the organization placed good, participatory citizenship as one of its highest priorities, where it remains today, as shown through such youth programs as Boys State and Boys Nation, Oratorical competition, Get Out the Vote and immigration and naturalization programs for immigrants seeking legal U.S. citizenship.



Overview

- Americanism is, quite simply, love of America – loyalty to its ideals and institutions, allegiance to its flag, willingness to defend it against all enemies foreign and domestic and a desire to pass along the blessings of liberty to future generations. According to The American Legion's Americanism Manual, "It is not a word. It is a cause, a way of life – the best way of life ever known."
- Whenever that way of life is threatened, The American Legion acts. Amid the social and labor unrest of the 1920s, the organization denounced radicalism in all its forms. In time, as seductive political doctrines gained devotees at home and abroad, the Legion declared most "isms" other than Americanism – fascism, racism, Nazism, pacifism and communism – poisonous and hostile to the republic
- Where these ideologies failed, others – different but no less subversive – have taken root. In 1989, the Supreme Court ruled in Texas v. Johnson that flag desecration is protected as free speech by the First Amendment. The Legion strongly disagreed, and, backed by all 50 states and a majority of Americans, continues to petition Congress to pass a constitutional amendment that would return to the states the people's right to protect the flag. More recently, the Legion has fought to keep the phrase "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance and has opposed establishment-clause lawsuits that aim to cleanse America of its religious heritage.
- As veterans of our nation's wars, Legionnaires are obliged to help others – particularly young Americans – understand and appreciate the joys and responsibilities of living in the freest country on earth. On the U.S. flag, the symbol of that freedom, the Legion is a nationally respected authority, instructing individuals, schools and businesses on its history and etiquette. In their communities, American Legion posts are also leaders in promoting patriotic observances like Memorial Day and Veterans Day, education, voting, acts of service and naturalization for legal immigrants. By encouraging people to play an active role in the nation's life, the Legion builds a more engaged citizenry and, thus, a strong America.



Overview

- Youth activities, too, instill character and civic responsibility. Thousands of young athletes play American Legion Baseball, celebrating our national pastime while learning teamwork, fair play and respect for rules. Through American Legion Boys State, thousands more young men learn and practice the functions of government. Students who participate in the High School Oratorical Scholarship Program gain a deeper knowledge of the Constitution. And the Legion's support for Scouting remains unmatched, with local posts chartering more than 2,400 units that serve more than 61,000 boys.
- Together, these programs – youth activities, flag education, community service, and mentoring candidates for naturalization and citizenship – are several important ways that The American Legion works to "foster and perpetuate a 100 percent Americanism."



Youth Activities

- The founders of The American Legion recognized early on that if the organization were to "inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation," it must invest in youth. Through a variety of programs, the Legion prepares young people for lives of civic responsibility, respect for the law, appreciation of their freedoms and a practical knowledge of how their government works.



American Legion Baseball

- Since 1925, American Legion Baseball has taught countless young Americans the importance of sportsmanship, good health and active citizenship. The program is also an active promoter of equality, making teammates out of wealthy bankers' and industrial workers' sons, and erasing the social divide between them. Most importantly, American Legion Baseball has been, and continues to be, a stepping stone to manhood for millions of young men who have gone on to raise families or play the sport at the highest level.



American Legion Boys State

- In 1935, Legionnaires Harold Card and Hayes Kennedy organized the first American Legion Boys State at the Illinois State Fairgrounds in Springfield. Meant to counter the Soviet Union's communist Young Pioneer camps, Boys State quickly caught on as a program to teach young Americans their rights, privileges and responsibilities as franchised citizens, as they set up their own city, county and state governments and elect representatives. Each participant is instructed in the duties of his public office, learning its function, powers and limitations. Today, 49 Legion departments conduct Boys State programs, usually on a college or university campus. Nearly 20,000 high school juniors attend every year, their expenses paid by sponsoring American Legion posts, local businesses or other community-based organizations



American Legion Boys Nation

- Two outstanding participants in each of the 49 Boys State programs attend American Legion Boys Nation in Washington, D.C. They represent their states as senators and are assigned to one of two mock political parties. The delegates then caucus, organize into committees, conduct hearings and act on bills they introduce into the Boys Nation Senate, all to learn how the federal government and its agencies operate. During the week, the young men visit Arlington National Cemetery, the Department of State, the Supreme Court and Capitol Hill and often meet the U.S. president. Since the program began in 1946, many Boys Nation graduates have been elected state legislators, governors, members of Congress and even president. Others go on to work on campaigns of candidates running for public office.



National High School Oratorical Scholarship Program

- Eleven states participated in the Legion's first oratorical contest in 1938. Today, 53 departments – including France and Puerto Rico – sponsor contestants in the national finals, where they compete for \$203,500 in scholarship money. The competition has two phases: prepared orations of eight to 10 minutes and an assigned topic of three to five minutes. Both are based on an aspect of the U.S. Constitution, with an emphasis on the citizen's duties and obligations to government.
- Department contests are conducted between January and March. The national contest is conducted in Indianapolis, during a weekend in April. The champion receives a \$25,000 academic scholarship, second place \$22,500 and third place \$20,000. Each department winner who competes in the first-round quarter-finals of the national contest receives a \$2,000 academic scholarship.



Junior Shooting Sports

- Competitive shooting is a popular recreational activity and, for some, a pathway to the U.S. Olympic Team. Since 1991, The American Legion Junior Shooting Sports Program has provided rifle safety, marksmanship training and shoulder-to-shoulder competitions for young people through local post-affiliated clubs, using .177-caliber air rifles.
- The American Legion Americanism Division annually presents its national Junior Three Position Air Rifle Tournament. The world-class competition provides American Legion-affiliated youth competitors an opportunity to test their skills against others from throughout the nation.
- The competition begins with a Postal Match, in which competitors fire on their home ranges using targets that have been marked for identification. The fired targets are then returned to The American Legion for scoring and ranking for awards. Annually, more than 1,500 individuals and 200 teams compete in Postal Matches.
- The tournament is divided into three rounds.
- The first round team tournament is a "paper" match and is comprised of the top four shooters' individual tournament scores. A club with at least four individuals enters one team. A club with at least eight individuals enters two teams, and so on.
- The first round and second round of the individual tournament are postal matches, whereas the third round is the individual national championship and a shoulder-to-shoulder competition.
- The American Legion Individual Three Position Air Rifle National Championships are held in July at the USA Shooting range facility located at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs.
- The winners in both the Precision and Sporter category each receive a \$5,000 college scholarship provided in part by The American Legion and The Sons of the American Legion. The two winners are also honored as part of the Youth Champions Delegation during the American Legion National Convention.
- Additionally, a \$1,000 college scholarships are awarded to the second place finishers in both the Sporter and Precision categories. Those scholarships are generously provided by the American Legion Auxiliary.



Scouting

- Boy Scouts of America was the first youth activity officially recognized by The American Legion at its first national convention in 1919. Believing that the skills and experiences of veterans are useful in building character and good habits in boys, posts have sponsored Scout units ever since. When a post decides to organize a unit, the commander appoints a Scouting committee, which meets with the local Scouting executive to outline how a unit functions.
- Every American Legion department should have a Scouting committee and each district should have a Scouting chairman serving on that committee. The department Scouting committee works with regional or area Boy Scouts of America directors to promote Scouting.
- Through the years, The American Legion has fought attempts to deprive Scouting of public support, sponsorship or facility space because of its leadership criteria and inclusion of God in its oath.
- Every year, the Legion awards a \$10,000 college scholarship to The American Legion Eagle Scout of the Year and three additional scholarships of \$2,500 each to the first, second and third runners-up.



Youth Cadet Law Enforcement Program

- Several American Legion posts and departments sponsor the Youth Cadet Law Enforcement Program in cooperation with their state police or highway patrol. Open to high school seniors who are interested in pursuing careers in law enforcement, these programs combine hands-on police and physical fitness training with classroom instruction. Topics include criminal and constitutional law, patrol procedures, evidence gathering, testifying in court, crisis intervention and firearms control. Though program names differ from state to state, most are conducted in the summer and run a week in duration.



Educational Activities

- The American Legion believes education is the cornerstone of the nation's future. Established in 1976, the Committee on Youth Education informs the Legion on developments and problems in education, recommends policies and programs, and encourages communications between the Legion and educators, students and other organizations concerned with the well-being of the U.S. education system. From achievement awards to financial aid, the committee upholds the Legion's reputation as a friendly and firm supporter of education at every level.
- Every year, posts present American Legion School Award medals to thousands of boys and girls in graduating classes of elementary, junior high and senior high schools. Winners are chosen based on the qualities of courage, honor, leadership, patriotism, scholarship and service. Post committees work with schools to select award recipients and present the medals.



Educational Activities

- Children of U.S. military personnel who have died while serving on active duty or those of disabled veterans are entitled to apply for federal money for college educations, but the rising cost of post-secondary education can create funding gaps.
- To close the gap, The American Legion established the Legacy Scholarship Fund for the thousands of children whose parents died while on active duty on or after 9/11.
- The goal is \$20 million, enough to fund scholarships for years through earnings on the principal.
- In 2016, the program was expanded to include the children of military veterans with a combined VA disability rating of 50 percent or greater.
- In 2006, The American Legion Riders took up the challenge with the first Legacy Run, collecting \$179,000 in donations as they traveled nearly 2,000 miles from Indianapolis to the 88th National Convention in Salt Lake City.
- From that point on, the annual motorcycle trek has been a boon for The American Legion Legacy Fund and now commonly raises over \$1 million during each of the annual runs.
- These Legacy Run donations combined with the generous annual donations from American Legion posts, Auxiliary units, Sons squadrons, ALR chapters, and individual members or sponsors will continue to propel the Legacy Fund towards its target goal of \$20 million.



Educational Activities

- In 1996, electronics giant Samsung chose The American Legion to administer a scholarship fund of \$5 million, as a gesture of appreciation for the Americans who came to South Korea's aid as it fought communist forces in the Korean War.
- Scholarships are awarded annually to high school juniors who complete either a Boys State or Girls State program and are direct descendants of U.S. wartime veterans.
- Every department is guaranteed an automatic lesser scholarship award. Applicants who are descendants of Korean War veterans receive special consideration.
- In 2015, Samsung expanded its alliance with The American Legion by granting additional funds for the national recognition of Samsung American Legion Scholars for the formation of the Samsung American Legion Alumni Association.



Educational Activities

- In 1921, representatives from The American Legion and the National Education Association met to discuss the widespread problem of illiteracy among Americans. Their talks led to the first American Education Week, intended to tell the public of the accomplishments and needs of the public schools and to secure the public's support in meeting those needs. With 12 other co-sponsors, the Legion helps select each year's American Education Week theme and encourages all posts to participate in activities that support local schools.
- Military veterans are living history, and Veterans in Community Schools connects American Legion posts to local schools so they can share that history. This initiative gives students an opportunity to hear firsthand from those who fought in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Iraq, Afghanistan and other military actions or conflicts. To start a program, post representatives meet with school officials to identify how veterans can help students understand the military's role in U.S. history, free from media spin and academic interpretation.
- In 2015, The American Legion began an effort to renew participation in the program. The Legion's national policy on education was updated, along with various media resources. The greatest change was the introduction of the "Education Development Guide," an expansion on, and combination of, the Education Chairman's Manual and the PACT Manual.



Flag Education

- The American Legion is the nation's leading voice on flag etiquette. In 1923, the National Americanism Commission convened the first National Flag Conference, where the Legion and 67 other organizations established "a definite code of rules so that every man, woman and child may know how to honor and revere the American flag," National Commander Alvin Owsley said.
- These rules included time and occasion for display, position and manner of display and conduct during hoisting, lowering or the passing in review of the flag. The conference's rules became the basis of the U.S. Flag Code, adopted by Congress in 1942.
- Every year, American Legion posts distribute hundreds of thousands of copies of its flag education DVD, "For Which It Stands," in schools, along with the "Let's Be Right on Flag Etiquette" booklet. The Legion's website also has a wealth of information about the U.S. flag, including an "Ask the Expert" link, the complete U.S. Flag Code, flag-folding procedures, a guide to disposing of unserviceable flags and a flag glossary.



Troop and Family Support

- Two Americanism programs that make differences in the lives of military personnel and their families are Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW) and the Family Support Network.
- The Family Support Network is designed to provide volunteer assistance for military families during deployments. OCW is dedicated to meeting the needs of wounded and ill military personnel and veterans by providing them with comfort items and recreational activities not usually supplied by the government.



Family Support Network

- The Family Support Network is a volunteer effort to provide assistance for military families during times of deployment. American Legion members step in to perform various household support activities, from babysitting to lawn care to auto maintenance, to assist spouses during deployments with orders that can turn two-parent households into single-parent households.



Operation Comfort Warriors

- OCW ensures that patients at U.S. military hospitals, VA facilities and warrior transition units receive items like sweatsuits, DVDs, puzzles, electronic devices, books, recreational equipment and more.
- OCW also provides larger items such as televisions, ping pong tables, entertainment centers, computers, kayaks and other goods for use by wounded warriors. At some military facilities, OCW has been used to take patients and their families to theme parks and sporting events, as well.
- Since December 2008, The American Legion has raised more than \$2,000,000 for OCW. Included in this amount is a \$250,000 grant awarded after OCW received the most votes in Pepsi's Refresh Everything project, finishing ahead of more than 700 other charities nationwide in an online voting competition.
- Formerly under the Americanism and National Security Divisions, Operation Comfort Warriors is now managed jointly by the national Internal Affairs and National Security Divisions.



Community Service

- Since its founding, The American Legion has led the way in observing patriotic holidays such as Memorial Day, Veterans Day, Independence Day and Flag Day. Posts nationwide organize or participate in ceremonies, parades, memorial dedications, concerts, picnics and other patriotic events.
- The Legion also emphasizes voter registration and participation. Through the "Get Out the Vote" program, American Legion posts organize teams in their communities to make sure local voters are properly registered and cast ballots on Election Day. The Legion's federal charter prevents it from supporting, opposing or aiding any political party or candidate, but posts are encouraged to sponsor town-hall forums and debates on the issues. Legionnaires also get involved by serving as poll volunteers.
- Another way American Legion posts strengthen their communities is through the "Service to God and Country" program. As the author of people's rights and liberties, God is essential to Americanism. Posts that adopt this program promote service to God through public worship, daily family prayers and the religious training of children. They also promote service to country by emphasizing the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
- For decades, American Legion posts have served their communities in countless unique ways. Some host golf or fishing tournaments. Some raise money to build swimming pools and playgrounds. Others establish war memorials, sponsor job fairs or offer child care. The common thread is a desire to make their communities better places to live.



Immigration and Naturalization Activities

- The American Legion supports manageable legal immigration and, since its founding, has mentored legal candidates for naturalization and citizenship. Many American Legion posts host classes on U.S. history, government and English proficiency, helping these candidates become contributing members of U.S. society.



How do I fit in?

- The success of The American Legion's Americanism programs depend on member volunteers who make them happen: the young Marine just back from deployment who wants to help coach a post's Legion Baseball team, the Vietnam War veteran who signs up to be a Boys State counselor, the beloved World War II veteran who has awarded American Legion school medals for 50 years. Some Legionnaires plug into post or department Americanism programs that have been running for decades; others see that a program doesn't exist in their town or city but should, so they start one. Many young veterans will remember an American Legion program that made a difference in their lives – Scouting or Shooting Sports, perhaps – and choose to give back to their communities by keeping the program going.
- Not every Americanism program can be effective at every post, but all posts can adopt at least a few programs based on the needs and interests of their communities. Nearly every community, for instance, has legal immigrants eager to learn how they can become contributing U.S. citizens. Every school has a U.S. flag and students who need to know its history and proper display. Every town and city has sent sons and daughters to war and desires meaningful ways to honor them on Memorial Day and Veterans Day. For members of the nation's largest veterans organization, Americanism is a core value that reaches into communities across the country, engages citizens of all ages, and demonstrates what our nation means to those who swore with their lives to defend it.





Children &
Youth



- The children of our buddies are our children, too. We feel that every opportunity, every possible care and comfort should be given them. Children must not be penalized nor denied the opportunities of a normal American upbringing because their fathers or mothers served our nation in uniform and came home drastically changed by the experience, or did not come home at all.
- Military service demands much of troops and their families: multiple deployments, frequent moves, the challenge of finding a job after hanging up the uniform and, in some cases, combat-related illness or death. The American Legion's commitment to veterans is also a commitment to their children, in every difficulty or hardship. Whether they're making household repairs, covering unanticipated medical expenses or rescuing a family from foreclosure, Legionnaires help maintain a stable home environment for the children of their comrades.
- The American Legion works to improve the lives of all children by awarding grants to agencies and organizations that serve children and youth, promoting child safety, and championing the family as the center of a healthy community. The Legion has devoted millions of dollars to meet the needs of young people, so they might have normal childhoods and realize their full potential – what early Legionnaires called "a square deal for every child."
- Child welfare has been a concern of The American Legion from the beginning. World War I devastated American families. Thousands of soldiers killed in action had children at home or on the way. Many veterans returned shell shocked or disabled, and the responsibility for their children kept them from seeking the medical care they needed.
- The fledgling American Legion responded by establishing several children's homes, or billets, around the country but soon realized that it would serve more children, and serve them better, by cooperating with existing local and state child welfare agencies when foster care was needed. Wherever possible, though, the Legion would make every attempt to save the home



- In 1924, Legionnaires elected James Drain of Washington national commander and charged him with raising a \$5 million endowment fund to aid disabled veterans and orphans. More than 900,000 Legionnaires, American Legion Auxiliary members and citizens contributed to the campaign, which reached its goal almost entirely through small gifts. Today, the Legion's Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) program provides direct aid to veterans' children through earnings from that endowment, now named The American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation.
- Under the direction of Drain and the Legion's director of Child Welfare, Emma Puschner, the organization developed the "Whole Child" plan, which declared that the child of every veteran should have "a home, health, education, character and opportunity."
- Aware that the children of war veterans would eventually make up 25 percent of the nation's youth population – a decade after World War II, they'd represent nearly half – the Legion saw the need to help all children, not just those of veterans. Since then, only in direct aid and casework has the Legion limited itself to the children of veterans.



In 1947, The American Legion's Child Welfare Committee became a commission, and in 1970, its name was changed to the National Commission on Children & Youth. In 2014, it returned to committee status

- This committee has three objectives:
- To strengthen the family unit in an increasingly more complex society
- To support organizations and agencies that provide services for children and youth
- To provide communities with well-rounded programs that meet the physical, educational, emotional and spiritual needs of young people
- While The American Legion has always had a special interest in helping the families of military personnel and veterans, it works on behalf of all the nation's children. Through a broad set of programs, the Legion touches millions of young lives, believing they are America's greatest natural resource.



Temporary Financial Assistance

- The American Legion is a service driven organization dedicated to supporting servicemembers, veterans and their families. Through the Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) program, an American Legion post can call upon the national organization to provide a cash grant targeted for helping meet the cost of basic needs for minor children of veterans and servicemembers experiencing temporary financial difficulties, thereby supporting a more stable home environment. TFA may assist with costs of things such as shelter, food, utilities and health expenses, for the minor children of:
- American Legion members, which includes those deceased veterans whose service would have qualified them for membership in The American Legion; OR
- Members of the US Armed Forces who are serving on federal orders for active duty that are current under Title 10 of the United States Code – assistance to active duty servicemembers is provided regardless of their membership in The American Legion.
- The TFA program provides a non-repayable, one-time cash grant that is awarded to eligible families when it's been demonstrated that a minor child is in need and that all other resources have been exhausted.



Temporary Financial Assistance

- All TFA applications originate at the post level. A local investigator visits with the family to determine the children's needs. The application is forwarded to the department Children & Youth chairman or department adjutant. Once approved, the application is forwarded to The American Legion National Headquarters. Upon approval by the national adjutant, a check is sent to the department adjutant for delivery to the post or family.
- Funds for the Temporary Financial Assistance program come from a share of earnings of The American Legion Endowment Fund, which is a separate 501(c)(3) organization, now doing business as the American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation. Thus, contributions are tax-deductible. Since 1925, the Legion has awarded nearly \$30 million in TFA grants.



Family Support Network

- Through The American Legion's Family Support Network, Legionnaires assist families of deployed military personnel in various ways: child care, yard work, car repairs, grocery shopping and routine household jobs. During the Persian Gulf War, National Guard and reserve units were activated without much notice, and the military wasn't prepared to deal with the needs of families left behind.
- So they wouldn't have to shoulder the burden alone, The American Legion established a free telephone number for families to call for assistance, and local posts responded to their needs. This mirrors the "community" post of the Legion's early days, when members provided a network of comrades and friends.
- Military and veteran families call the FSN number, 1-800-504-4098, or ask for assistance online at www.legion.org/familysupport. Requests are referred to the department, which in turn refers calls to local American Legion posts. The posts contact the families and, if able, provide assistance. If a post is unable to help, it refers the family to other local agencies. In cases of financial need, the post provides the necessary funds or helps the family apply for Temporary Financial Assistance if minor children are in the home.



Child Welfare Foundation

- Every year, The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation (CWF) awards hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants to help nonprofit youth service organizations improve the lives of children and youth. From juvenile diabetes to rare brain disorders, the projects funded by CWF educate families on the special needs of children. The entire American Legion family – the Legion, the American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion – are the foundation's primary contributors.
- In 1952, Dr. Garland Murphy Jr., department commander of Arkansas, told The American Legion he was willing to make a large contribution if its sole purpose was to serve children. With the National Executive Committee's approval, the Legion established CWF as a separate 501(c)(3) organization in 1954. At that time, Murphy assigned CWF fractional rights to nearly 10,000 acres of land in the oil-rich Williston Basin in Montana and North Dakota. In 1955, CWF awarded its first three grants, totaling \$22,500, to the Delinquency Control Institute, the National Association for Retarded Children, and the National Society for the Prevention of Blindness
- Since then, CWF has granted more than \$11 million to hundreds of deserving organizations that contribute to the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual welfare of children and youth. These include the Children's Organ Transplant Association, the Make-a-Wish Foundation, the National Children's Cancer Society, the National Autism Association, the MY HERO Project, and the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS).



Legislation

- The American Legion has clear positions on the challenges facing today's youth:
- The Legion opposes any attempts to weaken U.S. laws governing the production, sale and distribution of pornographic materials, especially that which depicts children.
- The Legion supports enacting legislation that would financially assist families facing the catastrophic illnesses of their children.
- The Legion supports continuing research, and early intervention efforts, to prevent intellectual disabilities, including research on the function of the nervous system, fetal treatments and gene therapy to prevent abnormalities produced by defective genes, and early intervention programs with high-risk infants and children.
- The Legion urges federal funding for state and local health agencies to ensure that indigent children have the opportunity to receive necessary vaccines and treatments.



Legislation

- The American Legion supports appropriate state and federal legislation restricting the excessive use of violence and vulgarity in movies, TV programs, news, video games and the Internet.
- The American Legion supports adequate funding for border, state, federal and military drug-trafficking prevention programs.
- The American Legion supports appropriate legislation aimed at the prevention, investigation and prosecution of child sexual exploitation.



Child Safety

- To promote child safety, the Americanism Commission's Committee on Children & Youth publishes several educational brochures for parents and children. Click on a brochure to learn more about it. Visit www.legion.org/publications to find the portfolio of brochures



National Family Week

- The American Legion recognizes families as the foundation of a strong community, and supports legislation that would establish Thanksgiving week as National Family Week. In 1968, Sam Wiley, a basketball coach and high school principal in Indianapolis, founded National Family Week. He believed the support of a strong family was vital for young people to have happy and productive lives. The Alliance for Children and Families has promoted the observance for more than 40 years, with the Legion's help. The American Legion encourages posts to organize and participate in local family activities, conduct military family appreciation events, and urge local and state governments to proclaim and observe National Family Week



How do I fit in?

- American Legion posts are essential to the organization's continued care and support for the nation's youth. If not for a local post, a veteran may not know that cash assistance is available to help pay a utility bill or buy groceries. If not for a local post, the Family Support Network is of little help to a military family struggling during a parent's deployment. Without a post, a community might never celebrate National Family Week or donate to the Child Welfare Foundation. Quite simply, Legion posts are the hands, feet and hearts of these forms of community service.
- The American Legion Family recognizes Children & Youth Month in April, and posts with active programs can strengthen them by promoting what they do in the media. The Legion encourages posts without active Children & Youth programs to build them up, because every community has children in need.
- Where these programs exist, Legionnaires have been extremely generous. The organization's most robust forms of financial aid – Temporary Financial Assistance and grants from the Child Welfare Foundation – have grown dollar by dollar even in tough economic times. For those eager to make lasting differences in the lives of children, such programs are a perfect combination of charity and service to America.
- Legionnaires can provide direct help by conducting fundraisers for the Child Welfare Foundation or the American Legion Veterans & Children's Foundation. All contributions go to grants; not a single penny is applied to overhead costs. They can also notify local nonprofit organizations with worthwhile programs that CWF grants can help them spread the word about the services they provide.
- Most often, it is also the local Legionnaire who learns firsthand about families that are struggling. That Legionnaire can help with the application process for TFA funds or volunteer to serve in the Family Support Network.
- Programs associated with the Children & Youth pillar reach deep into the core values of The American Legion. After World War I, the Legion's founders knew they had to step up for the children of their fallen comrades and for the families of veterans who had become disabled in the service. This sense of obligation continues nearly a century later, a hand extended not only to the children of those who have served, but to all young people, upon whom the future depends.





Conclusion



Other Committees & Commissions

- Membership, for instance, is the lifeblood of the organization. As the nation's largest veterans service organization, The American Legion has the respect of elected officials and the ability to gain access to them when needed. When The American Legion delivers a message on Capitol Hill, it does so on behalf of nearly 3.5 million patriotic Americans who are Legionnaires, American Legion Auxiliary members or Sons of The American Legion.
- The Internal Affairs Commission and the Membership & Post Activities Committee are charged with the recruitment and retention of Legionnaires and national marketing efforts, as well as post revitalization. Membership target dates are established through the course of a year, and awards are offered to departments that exceed their goals and to recruiters who renew and bring in new members.
- In addition to its responsibilities for membership growth and healthy posts, the Internal Affairs Commission has charge of such diverse programs as Sons of The American Legion, American Legion Riders, National American Legion College, special projects and promotions, as well as the Constitution and By-Laws Committee, Resolutions Assignment Committee, and Trophies, Awards and Ceremonials Committee.
- Many commissions and committees devote some portion of their work to membership management, such as the Information Technology Division, which manages the Legion's database, including online joining, renewal and customer service.



The Finance Commission

- The Finance Commission is a standing commission of the National Executive Committee. The commission is responsible for the financial management of the Legion, ensuring internal controls are in place and effective, that an independent audit is conducted annually and required tax reports filed, conducting a financial analysis for the organization, and making appropriate recommendations to the National Executive Committee.
- The commission's responsibilities include:
 - Oversight of the Legion's budget, including all revenues and expenditures
 - Oversight of the Legion's investments and investment policies
 - Oversight of the Legion's risk management and insurance policies
 - Guidance to the Legion's Life Insurance Committee
 - Guidance for the Legion's Marketing Commission and programs overseen by it
 - Board of directors and management of the American Legion Charities, Inc.



Marketing Commission

- The American Legion Marketing Commission receives quarterly reports from the National Emblem Sales Division, the organization's merchandising arm. The American Legion emblem is a registered trademark and cannot be used without expressed written consent of the national adjutant. Emblem Sales provides retail, catalog and online sales of American Legion caps, pins, jackets, shirts, ties, post materials and hundreds of other items. The nation's largest distributor of U.S.-made American flags, Emblem Sales maintains a narrow margin of operating profit to make materials as affordable as possible to members.



Convention Commission

- The American Legion Convention Commission coordinates all national conventions, major meetings and travel services for the organization. The commission works closely with department convention corporations years in advance to plan and conduct national conventions in major cities throughout the country.
- A typical national convention draws 10,000 or more attendees and top speakers, including the president of the United States, Cabinet secretaries, members of Congress, and top figures in entertainment and sports



Legislative Commission

- The American Legion Legislative Commission supports the four pillars of service and the resolutions of the membership in Washington and throughout the nation. Each year, the national commander delivers to Congress the Legion's legislative agenda, and the Legislative Commission works diligently to fulfill its mandates.
- The American Legion is represented at more than 100 hearings, conferences and meetings in Washington each year. The Legislative Commission also works with congressional and VA staff to craft meaningful legislation in support of veterans benefits, national security, Americanism and young people.
- Beyond the Beltway, The American Legion has a network of hundreds of Legislative Council members who maintain regular communications with congressional delegations in their states and districts. The commission offers a Legislative Action Center online to keep members informed and to let them know when to act on important issues.



Communication

- The American Legion has a variety of communications tools, from the local post newsletter to the national website and social media programs, to help members stay informed on news, issues and trends affecting the four pillars, as well as instructions about how to best operate posts, secure members and promote a satisfying American Legion experience.
- The Media & Communications Commission provides a portfolio of tools for posts and Legionnaires to spread the word about the organization, including sample speeches, news releases and public service announcements for radio and television. The commission also channels requests for outside media interviews to the appropriate spokespeople in the organization and handles media requests during the national convention. The production of many of the Legion's national promotional publications is the Media & Communications Commission's responsibility.



Media & Communications Commission

- The Media & Communications Commission provides leadership for the nation's largest publication for veterans. Reaching a readership of over 3 million per month, the "magazine for a strong America" includes interviews with top national figures, feature stories, photos, illustrations and graphics that drive at some of the most compelling issues on the national scene.
- In addition to the printed publication, the Media & Communications Commission is responsible for:
 - The national website at www.legion.org, which ranks first in visitation among all veterans websites
 - The monthly Dispatch, a newspaper specifically for leaders in the organization, with a circulation of more than 10,000
 - The national organization's presence on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest and YouTube
 - The American Legion Online Update e-newsletter, which reaches nearly 700,000 subscribers each week
 - The American Legion's portfolio of mobile apps
 - Many other annual or infrequent publications, such as the national convention program and the Legion's annual report



Marketing Commission

- The American Legion Marketing Commission, which was formed in October 2015, is charged with strengthening the organization's brand to a variety of audiences, including members, eligible non-members, corporate allies, other non-profit organizations and the general public. Among the vital services under the Marketing Commission umbrella are:
 - Membership marketing through direct mail and digital media
 - Member benefits programs and affinity relationships
 - General marketing of the organization's brand through multiple media channels
 - Integration of various American Legion marketing initiatives under one strategy
 - The Emblem Sales Committee reports to the Marketing Commission, which then reports to the Finance Commission.



- Thanks to an infrastructure of high-tech membership management, financial stewardship, communications and leadership training, The American Legion keeps its pillar values strong by offering ways for members of all skill sets to participate and make differences. Post newsletter editor. Legion Rider. Convention volunteer. Legislative Council member. Service officer. Boys State counselor. Baseball manager. Commander. The list of opportunities to serve is nearly limitless for those who call themselves Legionnaires. They are the Legionnaires the organization's founders envisioned. They are you.

