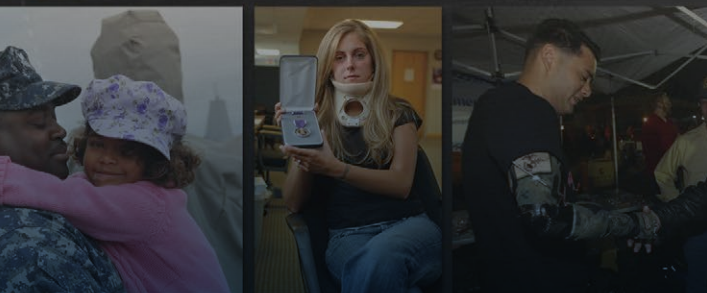


# Positions and Programs

Quick reference guide



# INTRODUCTION

## How to use this booklet

*“Positions and Programs of The American Legion”* is a guide to the organization’s stances on current issues of concern, as well as a reference to programs of national interest. It is written so that its various sections can be quickly melded into brief or extended remarks for presentations to various audiences, from Legion Family gatherings to media.

The booklet’s handy size makes it easy to carry or lay flat on a lectern when you are called upon to address an audience. It has enough information on a variety of subjects to make it the perfect guide for crafting speeches on important topics. You might also mark several pages and speak directly from the pamphlet.

When speaking on multiple topics, you can easily shift subjects with transitional phrases such as: *“another topic we should consider is ...”*; *“we are also very interested in ...”*; *“of course, we shouldn’t forget ...”*; or *“in addition to these pressing veterans’ issues, The American Legion continues to provide support to ....”*

Here are some suggestions on supplementing the material in this guide:

- Add your own personal anecdotes to make remarks more interesting to the audience.
- Mention outstanding accomplishments of people who are present.
- Localize topics by referring, for example, to a nearby VA health-care facility or a community American Legion Riders event.

The American Legion is the nation’s leading veterans service organization because it is diverse. There are enough positions and programs to choose from in this guide to fit the interests of your audience. If you wish to learn more about a particular position or program, contact the national staff or find more information at ***legion.org***.

This pamphlet is updated annually. If you have suggestions for improvements or additions, send them to the Media & Communications Division, American Legion National Headquarters, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206 or ***magazine@legion.org***.

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# POSITIONS



Flag Amendment

National Security

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

Veterans Employment & Education

# FLAG AMENDMENT

**The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that flag desecration is protected speech after a self-proclaimed communist was charged with desecrating the U.S. flag. The 1989 Texas v. Johnson case invalidated laws against flag desecration in 48 states and the District of Columbia. The American Legion and veterans were outraged that the Court, in a 5-4 ruling, took away the fundamental right for the people to protect their flag.**

The American Legion strongly supports a constitutional amendment that would return to the states the right to protect the U.S. flag.

For more than 25 years, The American Legion and the Citizens Flag Alliance, a coalition of more than 120 organizations, have championed the passage of a narrowly drawn constitutional amendment that would protect the flag. Such an amendment has passed the House of Representatives six times but fallen short of the necessary two-thirds supermajority required in the Senate. In 2006, the amendment fell only one vote short in the Senate.

Polls have shown that a majority of the American people support a flag-protection amendment. Additionally, every state legislature has appealed in writing to the U.S. Congress for passage of a flag amendment that can be sent to the states for ratification.

House Joint Resolution 51 and Senate Joint Resolution 20 were introduced during the current Congress.

The measures simply state, "The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States." The American Legion supports these measures and will continue to fight for the flag under which all veterans served. By contacting members of Congress, the American Legion Family can advocate for a vote on this important issue and call on congressional candidates to state for the record where they stand on the flag amendment.

The greatest tragedy in flag desecration is the disrespect it teaches children – disrespect for the values it embodies and disrespect for those who have sacrificed for those values. Disrespect is the genesis of hate. It provokes the dissolution of national unity symbolized by the flag.

The U.S. flag is good enough to cover the coffins of our fallen military and law-enforcement heroes; it is good enough to warrant protection.

The argument that flag desecration is a form of free speech is flawed. Flag desecration is behavior, not speech.

*For more information, email [cfa@legion.org](mailto:cfa@legion.org).*

**A strong national defense is one of the four pillars upon which The American Legion was founded. It remains a key focus of the organization. We live in an era of nontraditional threats – such as terrorism and cyberwarfare – as well as great military powers such as China and Russia. In this complex environment, it is essential that our national security system be vigilant and forward-looking. The American Legion is dedicated to ensuring that the United States is capable of handling current as well as emerging threats, wherever they may arise.**

**Weapons & Training:** The American Legion believe it is immoral to send troops to war without providing the resources needed for a successful outcome. The Department of Defense must be fully funded and equipped to meet the known and potential threats and challenges of the 21st century.

**End Forever Wars:** The American Legion National Executive Committee unanimously passed Resolution No. 22, Addressing the ‘Forever War’ at its virtual meeting Oct. 14-15, 2020. The resolution encourages Congress to “repeal and replace outdated Authorizations for Use of Military Force” and advocates for a “civilian-led approach of elevating development and diplomacy alongside a strong defense in order to build a better, safer world.”

**Supporting Allies:** Since 2018, The American Legion has called for the expediting of Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) to Afghan and Iraqi interpreters and other allies who stood “shoulder to shoulder,” with our diplomats and troops. These allies and their families face threats of torture and death as a consequence of their cooperation with the U.S. military. The American Legion believes that abandoning wartime allies will only make it more difficult to expect assistance from potential allies in future wars.

**Foreign Relations:** The American Legion fosters and maintains critical relationships with State Department diplomats and envoys from foreign governments and organizations worldwide. The American Legion believes that strong alliances and diplomatic outreach

can not only enhance U.S. interests but can often provide a much better alternative to war.

**POW/MIA Accounting:** The American Legion continues to support full funding for the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) in its mission to recover, identify or account for fallen American servicemembers from battlefields around the world.

**Secure Borders:** The American Legion supports legal immigration but strongly opposes amnesty and tax-funded benefits for those who have entered the country illegally. The American Legion believes in effectively and comprehensively tracking and screening all foreign visitors, securing U.S. points of entry and eliminating job magnets by sanctioning those who employ illegal workers.

**Citizenship for Service:** The American Legion believes that fully-screened noncitizens who serve in the U.S. military should have an expedited process of naturalization prior to their discharge. The American Legion also believes that honorably discharged immigrant veterans who have been deported but have no felony convictions should have their citizenship applications expedited. Spouses of those who died while serving in the U.S. military should also be granted citizenship after screening. Citizenship through service benefits both the military and those who volunteer to serve.

**Support for the All Volunteer Force & Their Families:** Strong recruiting incentives are needed to attract top talent to the U.S. Armed Forces. A high quality of life for military members and their families is not just the obligation of a grateful nation but a minimal retention requirement. A lack of affordable daycare options, food insecurity and insufficient family housing is still a problem in some military communities. As the American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of the American Legion can attest, it isn’t just the veteran that serves and sacrifices. Tuition assistance, bonuses and other benefits are also widely offered in the private sector, thus the military must work even harder to attract quality servicemembers.

**Military Health Care:** The American Legion categorically rejects any increases in co-pays, cost-sharing, and any other fees associated with TRICARE programs and supports closing gaps in coverage for National Guard and reserve forces.

**Pay Our Coast Guard Act:** Because the U.S. Coast Guard falls under the Department of Homeland Security, its funding is often not approved as early as the DoD branches of the Armed Services. The American Legion believes that Congress should pass the Pay Our Coast Guard Act in order to ensure that members of the Coast Guard do not experience pay interruptions in the event of future government shut-downs.

**The American Legion Programs:** Blood donor drives, disaster preparedness education, Law Enforcement Officer of the Year and Firefighter of the Year awards, Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps and Spirit of

Service awards are examples of how American Legion volunteers support their communities and honor the achievements of first responders, military personnel and future leaders.

**The Military Equipment Program:** Many American Legion posts show their support for the military and respect for its traditions through the use of ceremonial rifles and static displays. Posts in good standing can request surplus military equipment, including rifle ammunition through their department headquarters, which will then work with The American Legion's Washington-based national security division for verification.

*For more information, email [ns@legion.org](mailto:ns@legion.org).*

# VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION

**Since its formation, The American Legion has fought for compassionate care and treatment of U.S. military veterans and their families. It was instrumental in the consolidation of various federal agencies and bureaus into what became the Veterans Administration in 1930 and later evolved into the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in 1989.**

Throughout its relationship with VA, The American Legion has represented important stakeholders – veterans and their families – by providing oversight, consultation and constructive criticism through many peaks and valleys. The American Legion works with VA and veterans nationwide to achieve strategic solutions and steps toward modernizing the nation’s largest veterans health-care system and the benefits appeals process. The VA system, like all other health care providers, has been severely challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, VA facilities responded well and saved possibly millions of lives through vaccine distribution, testing and treatment of infected patients.

Problems still exist, however, with access, staffing and claims-processing backlogs. The American Legion remains committed to helping VA in its reform efforts.

The American Legion is dedicated to ensuring that VA’s Caregiver Program includes all veterans who meet the congressional requirements, regardless of when they served.

The VA MISSION Act, fully supported by The American Legion, was passed by Congress and signed by the president on June 6, 2018. The VA Maintaining Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act (MISSION) includes the most significant VA reforms in decades.

Before the MISSION Act, VA’s Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, which provides a monthly stipend to primary caregivers, was limited to veterans injured on or after Sept. 11, 2001.

The law expands eligibility to include veterans with a serious injury incurred or aggravated in the line of duty

in the active military, naval or air service on or before May 7, 1975. Following a two-year period from which the VA secretary submits to Congress the certification of a fully implemented information technology system, eligibility will be expanded to include all veterans with serious injuries incurred or aggravated in the line of duty in the active military, naval or air service on or after May 7, 1975, and before Sept. 11, 2001.

Additionally, The American Legion has long believed that veterans should be compensated and treated for any adverse health conditions that have resulted from toxic exposures incurred during military service. The American Legion strongly encourages Congress to pass the Toxic Exposure in the American Military Act, which among other things, would improve VA care for veterans exposed to toxic substances, expand access to benefits and establish an independent scientific commission to research the effects of toxic exposures among veterans. Burn pits, radiation clean-ups and the Karshi Khanabad (K2) Air Base, are just a few of the areas in which veterans are believed to have been exposed to toxic conditions.

Though The American Legion believes VA provides high-quality health care; timely access to that care remains a serious issue. The organization’s network of approximately 3,500 accredited service officers assists veterans and their families in applications for various benefits. The services provided are free, regardless of membership status or eligibility.

Among the key issues on the agenda of The American Legion’s Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission are:

- Mental health services that include non-pharmaceutical treatments and alternative therapies for post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury and military sexual trauma.
- Treatments tailored to meet the individual needs of affected veterans and their entire families, as recommended by The American Legion’s TBI-PTSD Suicide Prevention Committee.



# VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION

- Further research into the use of medical cannabis in states where it is legal for medicinal purposes as an alternative therapy.

The VA secretary identified suicide prevention among veterans as his highest clinical priority, and The American Legion established a Suicide Prevention Program in support of that priority by raising attention about veteran suicide and working to eliminate it by examining recent trends of veteran suicide as it relates to TBI, PTSD, MST and pain. The program is charged with analyzing best practices in veteran suicide prevention not currently used by DoD or VA for the purpose of encouraging government adoption of them. The American Legion strongly encourages any individual contemplating suicide to call the emergency crisis line at **1-800-273-8255, extension 1 for veterans or text 838255**. The American Legion advocates that the crisis line be adequately funded to ensure full operational efficiency.

VA must build new VA health-care facilities that meet space and budget requirements and are also activated on time so they meet the health-care needs of growing veteran populations in given areas.

Medical records must follow a veteran from military enlistment throughout life. Moreover, health information technology must be effectively used for storage and retrieval of medical records regardless of an individual's status in DoD or VA. VA must adjudicate benefit claims with higher accuracy and standards of performance throughout all regional offices.

The American Legion works with VA in support of the Fully Developed Claims process and the Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP), which streamline applications and accelerates decisions.

The American Legion's System Worth Saving program conducts site visits at VA medical facilities to assess quality and timeliness of veterans health care and gather feedback from veterans on their experiences. Though the visits have been suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, The American Legion is optimistic that its SWS teams can resume the practice in the near future. The American Legion shares its findings in an annual publication that is distributed to the president, Congress, VA officials and American Legion leadership.

VA health-care services for women veterans remain unequal to those for men. While VA has made some progress in this area, proper staffing must be provided for gender-specific care. The American Legion is working closely with VA and Congress to ensure smooth implementation of the VA MISSION Act, which addresses this issue among its reforms.

The American Legion recommends all VA health-care facilities employ medical professionals and clinicians who can provide military sexual trauma screenings and assist in the claims process for women.

*For more information, email [var@legion.org](mailto:var@legion.org).*

# VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION

**The American Legion's Veterans Employment & Education Commission plays a vital nationwide role in helping veterans and their families make the transition to rewarding civilian lives and careers. This area of American Legion advocacy addresses:**

Education and training

Licensing and verification

Employment programs and services

Small business development

Homelessness

As more individuals leave active-duty service, they look to The American Legion for guidance to make the transition to rewarding careers. On this front, The American Legion:

Works closely with campus veterans centers to ensure an adequate support network is available at colleges for those using their GI Bill benefits. This initiative has spurred growth in the number of American Legion campus posts around the country.

Sponsors, promotes and produces veterans career fairs nationwide, working with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, JobZone, DoD, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Labor, among other groups and agencies dedicated to veteran employment. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, many of these events have been held online – allowing job applicants and employers to participate virtually from locations around the globe.

Oversees federal veteran hiring initiatives, ensuring that agencies are complying with veterans' preference hiring laws and that VA meets and exceeds its goals for veteran hires.

Offers small-business counseling services to veteran entrepreneurs seeking to obtain VA's veteran-owned small business status.

Provides oversight for programs under the Department of Labor's Jobs for Veterans State Grants funding stream, ensuring that programs and services administered to veterans are funded and managed in a manner most beneficial to veterans.

Coordinates a Small Business Task Force, consisting of successful entrepreneurs who offer their fellow veterans guidance on business development, including workshops during the Legion's annual Washington Conference and national convention. Task force members also provide consultation about the federal contract procurement process and other opportunities available to veteran-owned businesses.

Testifies frequently on Capitol Hill in support of legislation and promotes national programs that help veterans pursue civilian careers, such as Veterans Preference hiring and Small Business Administration initiatives specifically for veterans. The American Legion also works closely with Congress and VA to continue strengthening the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Works at the federal and state levels to allow veterans to transfer their military experience into training credits for certification in a number of specialized career paths and trades, from emergency medical response to long-haul driving.

Assists transitioning veterans and servicemembers with finding meaningful employment through The American Legion Employment Innovation Task Force.

Works diligently at the national and local levels in support of housing programs, stand-downs and other activities that aim to give homeless veterans the opportunity to live independently in a safe and stable environment.

*For more information, email [vee@legion.org](mailto:vee@legion.org).*

# PROGRAMS

American Legion Riders

Americanism, Children & Youth

Buddy Checks

Membership

National Emergency Fund

Operation Comfort Warriors

Sons of The American Legion

The American Legion Legacy Scholarship

The American Legion Media Alliance

Veterans & Children Foundation

# AMERICAN LEGION RIDERS

**The American Legion Riders (ALR) program is a nationally recognized association of American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion members who enjoy the sport and comradeship of motorcycling. It supports the aims and objectives of The American Legion along with local, state and national programs and charities. ALR is one of the most visible of American Legion activities, reminding the public of the honorable nature of military service.**

Like so many other successful national programs, the American Legion Riders simply started with an idea at a local post. In 1993, members of Garden City, Mich., Post 396 conducted a motorcycle activity to raise money and advance the post's causes. Word quickly spread. Within months, new ALR chapters

were forming at posts nationwide. Chapters now exist in 54 departments of The American Legion, with many outside the United States. There are now an estimated 121,000 Riders and 2,100 chapters worldwide.

ALR annually conducts the American Legion Legacy Run, a cross-country multi-day motorcycle event. As many as 500 participants ride more than 1,000 miles from a predetermined starting point, ending at the national convention city. Since 2006, the Legacy Run has raised more than \$12 million for the American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund. These American Legion Family members truly are "Riding for America's Future."

*For more information, email [legionriders@legion.org](mailto:legionriders@legion.org).*

# AMERICANISM, CHILDREN & YOUTH

The American Legion operates and sponsors hundreds of youth programs and patriotic community activities for all ages. These include American Legion Boys State and Boys Nation, Oratorical Contests, American Legion Baseball, flag education, the School Award Medal Program, the Child Welfare Foundation and more.

## **American Legion Boys State and American Legion Boys Nation**

American Legion Boys State is the nation's most respected educational program of government instruction for high school students. Selected high school juniors participate in model states, mirroring the structures and operations of their respective state governments. Launched in 1935, 49 states and the District of Columbia conduct this program in a typical year, serving about 19,000 young men annually.

Two outstanding delegates from each Boys State program are invited to participate in American Legion Boys Nation. Conducted annually near Washington, D.C., the program centers on the federal government and its supporting agencies. Alumni include past and present members of Congress, state governors and even a former U.S. president.

The American Legion Auxiliary sponsors similar programs for young women through Girls State and Girls Nation.

## **American Legion Baseball**

Founded in 1925, American Legion Baseball strives to teach practical lessons in sportsmanship, citizenship, loyalty, respect, fair play, courage and physical fitness. More than 3,000 teams serve nearly 50,000 young athletes participating in all U.S. states and Canada.

State championship teams annually enter tournament competition, vying to play in the American Legion World Series in Shelby, N.C., which is broadcast live on ESPN. Many successful major leaguers have played American Legion Baseball. Alumni include 82 Hall of Famers and current stars such as Kris Bryant, Bryce Harper, Corey Seager and Justin Verlander.

## **Youth Cadet Law Enforcement Program**

This program is designed to foster respect for law enforcement, patriotism, and responsible citizenship among high school students who have completed their junior year. Participants must be in good academic standing, possess high moral character and have the desire to learn more about the law-enforcement profession. American Legion departments are encouraged to sponsor Youth Cadet Law Enforcement programs in cooperation with their state police or highway patrols.

## **High School Oratorical Scholarship Program – “A Constitutional Speech Contest”**

The American Legion Oratorical Contest develops among high school students a deeper knowledge and understanding of the U.S. Constitution. The contest has two phases: prepared orations of eight to 10 minutes and an assigned topic presentation of three to five minutes. Department-level contests are usually held January through March. Typically, the national competition is conducted over a weekend in April in Indianapolis. Scholarships totaling \$203,500 are awarded to winners at the national level. Additional scholarships may also be awarded at other levels of competition.

## **Junior Shooting Sports Program**

The American Legion's Junior Shooting Sports Program is a national activity administered through American Legion-affiliated clubs organized to provide gun safety and marksmanship training for young people. Recognized by shooting sports groups as one of the country's premier amateur shooting programs, Junior Shooting Sports attracts approximately 1,400 young people per year to compete for berths in the national competition, culminating at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo. Any recognized youth group with responsible adult leadership may participate, but the group must be affiliated with an American Legion post.

## **American Legion Eagle Scout of the Year**

The American Legion, which has supported Scouting since 1919, sponsors more than 2,300 units serving 58,000 young people and involving nearly 22,000 adult leaders nationwide. The organization annually sponsors a national scholarship awarded to the Scout selected as The American Legion's Eagle Scout of the Year." The winner receives a \$10,000 scholarship. Additional scholarships of \$2,500 each are awarded to three runners-up.

## **American Legion Child Welfare Foundation**

The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, Inc., (CWF) has awarded more than \$18 million in grants for the betterment of children since its founding in 1954. The mission of the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation is to contribute to the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual welfare of children and youth by awarding grants supporting beneficial research, studies, surveys, projects, programs and other initiatives.

CWF has provided funds to help educate the public about such topics as Huntington's disease, juvenile diabetes, shaken baby syndrome, autism, meningitis, Marfan syndrome and court-appointed advocates. The American Legion covers overhead costs for the foundation, so 100 percent of CWF contributions go directly to help children.

Contributions may be sent to the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206.

## **Children & Youth Month**

The American Legion observes Children & Youth Month each year in April. The national theme is "Children ... our most precious natural resource." Programs fall into the following categories: children's health, child safety and family support.

## **National Family Week**

For years, The American Legion has, by mandate, advocated passage of federal legislation designating the week of Thanksgiving as National Family Week. The American Legion continues to support such legislation and, in the meantime, conducts its own observances of National Family Week.

## **Flag Education**

Flag education has been a major program of The American Legion since its founding. Each year, posts distribute literature about proper flag display and respect to schools and groups. The American Legion also offers "For Which It Stands," an instructional DVD for school flag-education programs throughout the United States.

## **School Award Medal Program**

The American Legion School Award Medal Program recognizes courage, honor, leadership, patriotism, scholarship and service among deserving students.

*For more information, email [americanism@legion.org](mailto:americanism@legion.org).*

# BUDDY CHECKS

During its meeting of May 8-9, 2019, The National Executive Committee of The American Legion passed Resolution No. 18 designating “Buddy Check,” as a formal process executed Legion-wide. The concept is simple and spelled out in one of the clauses of the resolution. “Only with servant leadership and direct contact can we uncover needs and priorities of our warriors and avert any crisis,” it states in its WHEREAS section.

Through regular contact with veterans in communities across the country and overseas, Legionnaires can learn that some of their comrades may be coping with disability, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, loneliness or be perfectly healthy and fine. In any scenario, buddy checks are an effective means to build camaraderie. Moreover, no crisis is more serious among veterans than the high rate of suicides. If a single buddy check prevents a veteran from taking his or her own life, the program will certainly have proven its enormous value.

Through a phone call or personal visit, Legionnaires can send a strong message of caring and compassion. Even if the buddy checker is unable to substantively assist or solve a problem, the buddy checker should be able to find someone who can help. **If any veteran is feeling thoughts of suicide, he or she should be strongly encouraged to call the national crisis line at 1-800-273-8255, extension 1 or text 83822.** Most of the veterans who have committed suicide in recent years were not receiving help in the VA system. Follow-up is essential if the buddy checker senses that a veteran

is suffering a crisis.

All the tools needed to conduct a successful Buddy Check program can be found at [www.legion.org/buddycheck](http://www.legion.org/buddycheck). Scripts, tips for accessing local veterans and FAQs can be found on the website. Though many Legionnaires choose to conduct buddy checks throughout the year, posts are especially encouraged to conduct these calls and visits during the week leading up to The American Legion birthday (March 15) and Veterans Day (November 11).

Both houses of Congress are considering bills that would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to designate one week each year as “Buddy Check Week” for the purpose of outreach and education concerning peer wellness checks for veterans and for other purposes. The American Legion encourages Legionnaires to ask their legislators to pass the Buddy Check bill.

The purpose of a buddy check is not to seek donations or membership. It is solely a health and welfare check on peers that are often referred to in the military as “battle buddies.” A buddy check is the embodiment of the pledge that we take as we recite the Preamble to Constitution of The American Legion and pledge “to consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness.”

*For more information, email [internalaffairsdivision@legion.org](mailto:internalaffairsdivision@legion.org).*

# MEMBERSHIP

**The American Legion's ability to influence decision-makers in Washington, help veterans get their VA benefits and serve as valuable mentors to young people depends on membership. It is essential to grow membership to fulfill the organization's positions, programs and services at every level.**

During The American Legion's centennial, the national Membership & Post Activities Committee launched a strategic plan to stimulate a "culture of growth" at every level. Membership plans are underway at the national, department, district, county and post levels, built around five priorities:

1. Brand awareness
2. Communication
3. Training, education and leadership development
4. Post creation, development and revitalization
5. Recruitment and retention

With passage of the LEGION Act, anyone who has served honorably on active duty since Dec. 7, 1941, is eligible to join The American Legion. Those currently serving on active duty or having been activated in the National Guard or reserves are eligible as well. Basic training can be a qualifier membership as long as it was performed under Title 10 orders. Not only did the LEGION Act open membership eligibility for an estimated 4.2 million veterans that were previously unable to join The American Legion, it allows for many more millions of family members to now join the Sons of the American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary.

Together, we can meet our membership goals through several methods, including:

**Going door to door**, seeking veterans who never joined The American Legion or those who let their memberships lapse. Eye-to-eye contact is the most effective way to connect with potential and existing members. The national commander has made it a goal for the organization to achieve a 90 percent retention rates, as well as recruit new members this year. Using MyLegion.org, membership teams can get lists of current members in at-large membership status and those with lapsed memberships to make personal contact.

**Developing new posts.** American Legion-eligible veterans may wish to charter new posts in their com-

munities. Steps to apply for charters are available at [legion.org/membership](http://legion.org/membership). Some American Legion members prefer to meet at churches, restaurants, hotels or other locations, aware that brick-and-mortar post homes are not a requirement for an effective post.

**Revitalizing posts and districts.** Revitalization efforts include community outreach events and membership campaigns in local areas. National staff assistance can be requested through departments.

**Reconnecting with the military.** Outreach from The American Legion to the military is essential. Encourage post members to acquaint themselves with those still serving and introduce them to such American Legion programs as Temporary Financial Assistance, Operation Comfort Warriors and the National Emergency Fund, which demonstrate The American Legion's support for those in uniform and communities in need.

**The American Legion Family.** Made up of more than 2,100 chapters and more than 121,000 members, The American Legion Riders are growing in popularity, as is Sons of The American Legion, which is currently the largest veteran support organization in the world. Coupled with the American Legion Auxiliary, the entire American Legion Family can work together to increase membership for each post, unit, squadron and chapter. Wives, male spouses, daughters, mothers, sisters and granddaughters can join the American Legion Auxiliary; sons or grandsons of Legion-eligible veterans can join Sons of The American Legion. Legionnaires and Legion Family members can also join the American Legion Riders.

American Legion Family members who possess federally issued licenses as amateur radio operators are welcome to join **The American Legion Amateur Radio Club (TALARC)**, [www.legion.org/hamradio](http://www.legion.org/hamradio). The club promotes communication through ham radio and encourages posts to participate in local disaster preparedness and emergency communications operations. Under the FCC call sign K9TAL, the club operates a special event station on Veterans Day and The American Legion birthday.

For more information, email [membership@legion.org](mailto:membership@legion.org).



# NATIONAL EMERGENCY FUND

**Disaster relief has been a part of The American Legion's identity since the early 1920s, when it entered a formalized agreement with the Red Cross to provide volunteer help and raise money in times of catastrophe.**

Known as The American Legion's Disaster Relief Program, it worked in conjunction with the Red Cross for about 50 years. Over that time, The American Legion, through local posts, assisted disaster victims with housing, food, supplies and cleanup.

After Hurricane Camille struck the Gulf Coast in 1969, the National Executive Committee created the National Emergency Fund (NEF) as a one-time initiative to better assist American Legion Family members and posts, with immediate funds of up to \$1,500 for individuals, and up to \$5,000 for posts.

In 1989, when Hurricane Hugo pummeled South Carolina, the NEF was revived. It continues to assist Legion Family members recovering from natural disasters. Grants of up to \$3,000 each are awarded to eligible individuals, with up to \$10,000 for posts.

Since the NEF's inception, more than \$9 million has been provided in direct financial assistance to American Legion and SAL members, as well as posts.

All contributions are deposited in a special account and used exclusively to meet a member's most urgent needs. Not one donated dollar is used for fundraising or administrative costs. The NEF has kept damaged posts from closing and helped American Legion and SAL members rebuild their lives after disasters.

Funds are provided as grants, not loans, and offer assistance to current members for out-of-pocket expenses like temporary housing, food and clothing in devastated areas. The funds are not designed for insurance compensation or to cover monetary losses from a business, nonresidential structures on property (like barns or sheds), equipment or vehicles.

Disbursement amounts are decided on a case-by-case basis. Applications are available at department headquarters or online at [legion.org/nef](http://legion.org/nef). Your department adjutant can provide further details.

With the massive destruction caused by Hurricane Ida and wildfires in the western United States, donations are needed more than ever before. Tax-deductible donations to the NEF can be made at [legion.org/donate](http://legion.org/donate). Learn more about the program at [legion.org/nef](http://legion.org/nef).

*For more information, email [ia@legion.org](mailto:ia@legion.org).*

# OPERATION COMFORT WARRIORS

**Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW) is a program dedicated to meeting the needs of wounded, injured or ill men and women in military and veterans hospitals, wounded warrior battalions and transition units, and individuals transitioning back to their communities from these medical facilities. OCW provides comfort items and recreational experiences not usually supplied by the government, and helps assist wounded, injured or ill veterans transition from military to civilian life.**

Operation Comfort Warriors puts to good use donations that help patients at military and veterans hospitals and warrior transition units. Funds purchase items that assist in rehabilitation or provide recreation or socialization experiences during recovery.

OCW donations have included loose-fitting sweatsuits for those suffering from burns, recreational outings to amusement parks and sports equipment for adaptive therapy programs. OCW also provides larger items, such as ping pong tables, electronic dartboards, kayaks and other items for use by wounded warriors.

Operation Landstuhl – from which OCW evolved – was created by Past National Commander Paul Morin to raise funds for troops hospitalized at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. In 2008, then-

National Commander David K. Rehbein expanded the effort to purchase items for troops at all U.S. military hospitals and transition units. Operation Landstuhl and OCW have raised millions to purchase comfort items for troops worldwide. The program has received national acclaim, but more importantly, it shows recovering military personnel and veterans what The American Legion is and does.

Since 9/11, tens of thousands of U.S. troops have been injured, sickened and hospitalized. From fitness equipment for troops recovering at Fort Jackson, S.C., to electronics for Marines at Camp Pendleton, Calif., and every place in between, OCW is The American Legion's way of thanking those who have defended our nation. The program is a major sponsor of the Cleveland Freedom Rows rowing team.

OCW is successful because of the many individuals, American Legion posts, American Legion Auxiliary units and Sons of The American Legion squadrons that have raised funds and donated to the program. Visit [legion.org/ocw](http://legion.org/ocw) for the latest OCW news.

You can donate online or by mailing a check to Operation Comfort Warriors, The American Legion, P.O. Box 361626, Indianapolis, IN 46236.

*For more information, email [ocw@legion.org](mailto:ocw@legion.org)*

# SONS OF THE AMERICAN LEGION

All direct male descendants – sons, grandsons, great-grandsons of Legionnaires or of those deceased veterans who served after Dec. 7, 1941, are eligible to join the Sons of The American Legion. The Sons started in 1937 and has become the nation’s largest veteran support program, as well as the strongest program of The American Legion. There are more than 349,000 members in squadrons around the world.

The Sons organization is divided into detachments at the state level and squadrons at the local level. A squadron pairs with a local American Legion post; a squadron’s charter is contingent upon its parent post’s charter. However, squadrons can determine the extent of their services to the community, state and nation. They are permitted flexibility in planning programs and activities to meet their needs, but must remember S.A.L.’s mission: to strengthen the four pillars of The American Legion. Therefore, squadrons’ campaigns place an emphasis on preserving American traditions and values, improving the quality of life for our nation’s children, caring for veterans and their families, and teaching the fundamentals of good citizenship.

At the local level, SAL members support veterans, veteran families and youth in their communities through more than 1.7 million volunteer hours a year, according to Consolidated Post Reports. A big component of SAL activity is fundraising. Last year, the Sons of The American Legion raised donations of more than \$5.32 million for American Legion programs and VA Volunteer Services.

In combination with all components of the American Legion Family, the Sons of the American Legion can be a crucial part of the success of a local post, offering those who may not have served in the military opportunities to participate and support veterans.

The following is the Preamble used by the Sons of the American Legion:

*Proud possessors of a priceless heritage, we male descendants of veterans of the Great Wars, associate ourselves together as “Sons of The American Legion” for the following purposes:*

*To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America; to maintain law and order; to foster and perpetuate a true spirit of Americanism; to preserve the memories of our former members and the association of our members and our forefathers in all wars; to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the Community, State and Nation; to combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses; to make right the master of might; to promote peace and good will on earth; to safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy, to consecrate and sanctify our friendship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness; to adopt in letter and spirit all of the great principles for which The American Legion stands; and to assist in carrying on for God and Country.*

For more information, email [sal@legion.org](mailto:sal@legion.org).

## THE AMERICAN LEGION LEGACY SCHOLARSHIP

The American Legion assists families of U.S. military personnel who have died or became disabled while serving on active duty on or after Sept. 11, 2001, by providing college scholarships for their children. The program expanded in 2017 to include scholarships for students whose post-9/11 veteran parents have been assigned a 50 percent or greater combined disability rating by VA.

The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund was established by the National Executive Committee in October 2001. By September 2021, 433 scholarships totaling more than \$4 million had been awarded since the fund's inception. The American Legion Legacy Run is a major contributor to the fund, often raising more than \$1 million a year.

Efforts are underway to encourage contributions from Legion Family members, corporations and others to help the fund reach \$20 million, which would allow it to be fully self-sustaining.

As an unfortunate consequence of war, many children of active-duty U.S. military personnel are now members of single-parent families. The total survivor benefits provided by the federal government are not enough to pay tuition and other costs at even the most affordable colleges. The gap widens when considering future costs, and many students resort to student loans and long-term debt after college. Similar difficulties are faced by the children of veterans who are disabled due to military service.

American Legion Family contributors and the general public may send donations to the American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund, P.O. Box 361626, Indianapolis, IN 46236. Donations may also be made at [legion.org/donate](https://legion.org/donate) and through contributions to American Legion Charities.

*For more information, email [scholarships@legion.org](mailto:scholarships@legion.org).*

# THE AMERICAN LEGION MEDIA ALLIANCE

Public relations spokespeople, media practitioners and communicators at every level in The American Legion are welcome to join The American Legion Media Alliance (TALMA), where they can compare notes, exchange advice and network with like-minded American Legion Family members.

Created in 2020, TALMA's mission is to provide resources, education and training for members who are responsible for handling communications and public relations at the post, district and/or department levels.

Overseeing TALMA is the national chairman of The American Legion Media & Communications Commission. The chairman appoints a task force representing the commission, as well as representatives from the Sons of The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary.

The task force guides TALMA, working with a liaison from the national Media & Communications Division. Throughout the year, the task force meets to discuss progress, goals and to judge the annual contest. Membership in TALMA is open to all members of the American Legion Family. Dues are \$15 per year. The membership year begins on September 1 and eligible members can join by visiting [legion.org/talma/join](http://legion.org/talma/join)

Among the benefits of TALMA membership:

- A press credential and lanyard.
- Free entry into the annual awards contest.
- Access to monthly virtual training sessions.
- Access to a private Facebook group.

- First crack at resources from national headquarters to promote post events. These include, but are not limited to, flyers, ads, social media promotions, posters, press release templates and more.
- A monthly newsletter.

The annual TALMA contest entry period runs throughout the year. All entries must be submitted electronically and will be judged by the M&C Commission, led by the TALMA task force.

The contest is open to all alliance members in good standing. Entrant(s) must be a current TALMA member(s) and all entries must be the original work of the entrant(s). Violations of copywriting rules, plagiarism or other ethical breaches could result in the entrant's dismissal from TALMA.

Categories include publications, websites, social media campaigns, visual media, editorial / news writing, editorial / informational writing and public relations / community outreach.

Additionally, TALMA created two special awards. They are the Chairman's Award (a best in show award, an overall winner of all the categories) and an Innovation Award, which honors an effort that demonstrates true innovation.

There are many reasons to join TALMA. Professional development, camaraderie and peer recognition are a few. Last but not least is the fun factor.

*For more information, email: [talma@legion.org](mailto:talma@legion.org)*

# VETERANS & CHILDREN FOUNDATION

**The American Legion's Veterans & Children Foundation through its Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) program provides cash grants to help meet the basic needs of veterans and military personnel with minor children at home when no other resources are available. As the TFA name implies, the grants are for temporary relief only.**

Additionally, the Veterans & Children Foundation funds training for American Legion service officers who assist veterans free-of-charge in obtaining benefits that they have earned through military service. American Legion service officers assist any veteran, regardless of whether the veteran is a member of The American Legion or not.

Since its establishment in 1925 as The American Legion Endowment Fund, the program which is currently known as the Veterans & Children Foundation, has awarded cash grants to minor children of current active-duty personnel or American Legion members. Active-duty applicants can be considered without being a member of The American Legion. These one-time, non-repayable grants help families in need meet the cost of shelter, food, utilities and health expenses, thereby keeping a child or children in a stable environment during financial hardships. Through TFA, The American Legion sends a message that it does not turn its back on the children of America's veterans during times of personal difficulty.

In 2019, The American Legion awarded more than \$1 million in TFA grants to Coast Guard families who had their pay interrupted during the longest government budget shutdown in history.

No applicant is considered eligible for TFA until complete vetting is done at the post or department level. A legitimate family need must be determined, and all other available assistance resources must have been utilized or exhausted. Additionally, the TFA application must originate and be filled out by someone at the local level. To apply for a grant, one must contact a local American Legion post. It is the responsibility of

the American Legion post or department involved to make every effort to secure assistance for the children from its own resources, or from other organizations or agencies within the community. TFA provides a safety net when all other means have been tried.

Payments from the program may be made to, or on behalf of, the family to pay a variety of expenses necessary to maintain the health and welfare of the children involved.

Maintenance grants may not be used for debt incurred prior to the date of application, unless the debts are utility or shelter expenses. They may be used for:

Food

Shelter – rent or mortgage payment

Utilities

Clothing

Medical grants must be approved prior to any debt being incurred. These grants may be used for:

Medical care

Surgery

Dental care

Pharmaceuticals

Dietary needs

Hospitalization

Nursing and convalescent care

Donations can be made to the Veterans & Children Foundation by visiting [legion.org/donate](https://legion.org/donate). American Legion Family members and supporters can also assist the V&C Foundation by participating in the annual 100 Miles for Hope campaign. Campaign participants engage in a variety of activities during the summer to include walking, running, swimming and other exercises.

*For more information, email [americanism@legion.org](mailto:americanism@legion.org).*

 AMERICAN  
**LEGION**

P.O. Box 1055  
Indianapolis, IN 46206  
(317) 630-1200

 **legion.org**

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