



THE FOUR PILLARS

THE VALUE OF AMERICAN LEGION MEMBERSHIP
IS BUILT AROUND FOUR MAJOR MISSIONS.

In southern California, a Vietnam War veteran who knows firsthand the cruel realities of homelessness now leads one of the nation's most dynamic efforts to help severely wounded troops find their way home from war, sometimes with missing limbs, mental illness or broken families.

In a courtroom at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, a Chinese-American veteran from New York City closely monitors legal proceedings to assure that detainees from the war on terror are given fair opportunities to plead their cases.

In a college corridor in Maine, a patriotic veteran stands with his arms folded and stops students from walking across a U.S. Flag laid out on the floor. He is threatened with arrest before the so-called "art" project is removed.

A group of veterans in Alabama takes an annual motorcycle ride to a summer camp for children with cancer. Terminally ill youngsters thrill to the rumble of the big bikes. They try on helmets. They twist the throttles. The veterans drop off a check for \$10,000 before heading out.

These are some extraordinary veterans.

They are also members of The American Legion.

And their stories can be multiplied thousands of times over, across the nation and around the world. They abide by the preamble of a constitution nearly 90 years ago, words that are held aloft on four main pillars of service and advocacy:

- Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
- National Security
- Americanism
- Children & Youth

Last spring, I asked our National Headquarters staff to prepare a "white-paper" report to provide information for the leading presidential candidates this year. Its intent was to spell out The American Legion's positions on VA health



National Commander
Marty Conatser

care, veterans benefits claims, the GI Bill, jobs and business opportunities, adjustment assistance for wounded warriors returning home, and other important issues taken up by our Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission. These are, indeed, major aspects of what we do.

But that's not all we do. And so, the report needed to be expanded.

The new commander in chief also needs to understand The American Legion's ongoing commitment to success in the global war on terrorism – that we support the troops *and* their mission.

The candidates need to know that The American Legion opposes illegal immigration and amnesty for illegal aliens, but fully supports opportunities for *legal* immigration. The candidates need to know that a full accounting of our POW/MIAs is a sacred priority, as is a decent quality of life for military personnel and their families. The candidates need to know that the strength of American Legion conviction on issues we include within the pillar known as National Security.

No candidate should ever question our patriotism. Upon the pillar of Americanism, this organization promotes obedience to law and order, and respect for the U.S. Flag. The American Legion builds enthusiasm for public service among

young people through such programs as Boys Nation and the National Oratorical Contest. We will never abandon Boy Scouts of America as it fights disingenuous lawsuits filed by profit-minded legal organizations. We believe God deserves a place in the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States of America, and in the town square, too.

The roots of the fourth pillar – Children & Youth – reach back to the combat-weary doughboys who founded The American Legion. They survived trench warfare, machine-gun firefights, mid-air dogfights and mustard gas. When they called their first caucus at Paris in 1919, they focused not on themselves but on the children and youth of America. They knew that children were made orphans by the war, and that many had little chance to succeed without help. The slogan they coined resonates today: "A Square Deal for Every Child." Millions of dollars have since been raised and innumerable hours have been volunteered by Legionnaires, in order to help children who are sick or in need, or simply looking for opportunities to achieve their goals. The American Legion has advocated on their behalf, fighting against such social ills as child pornography, teen suicide, drug abuse and violence at home.

The American Legion, with 2.7 million members and more than 14,000 posts, has flourished since 1919 because of these pillars, these values. The pillars are us, and we are them. As you read the following pages, take pride. You are among millions of extraordinary veterans who call themselves Legionnaires, past, present and future. And it is our duty to keep strengthening the pillars.

Marty Conatser



PREAMBLE TO THE AMERICAN LEGION CONSTITUTION

FOR GOD AND COUNTRY, WE
ASSOCIATE OURSELVES TOGETHER 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
one hundred percent Americanism;

to preserve the memories and incidents
of our associations in the Great 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 comradeship
by our devotion to mutual helpfulness.



PILLAR I: VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION



The American Legion has for nearly 90 years acted as the nation's leading advocate for proper health care, economic opportunity and legal benefits for U.S. military veterans. The Legion was instrumental in the creation of the Veterans Administration in 1930 and an ardent supporter of its elevation to cabinet status when it became the Department of Veterans Affairs in 1989. The relationship between VA and The American Legion continues to evolve today.

As it has for decades, The American Legion continues to aggressively lobby for adequate funding of VA health care, timely access to facilities, fair rulings on benefit claims and economic opportunities for those who have come home changed by their military experience. A nationwide network of American Legion department service officers works diligently to assist veterans as they pursue benefits and care they earned and deserve. At the local, state and national levels, thousands of Legionnaires provide countless hours to help veterans understand their benefits. The American Legion provides professional representation in claims appeals, discharge disputes and transition assistance from active-duty to civilian status throughout the country.

Today, as the number of discharged veterans from the global war on terrorism has surpassed 500,000, the Legion's federally chartered role to support them could not be more profound. The Legion strongly believes that a veteran is a

veteran, no matter the war era, nature or location of service. In that light, The American Legion is the only organization that works on behalf of all 24.5 million U.S. veterans, and all who will follow.

The American Legion stands on the front line of change in the pillar of service known as "Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation."

It is a complex and vital part of the organization's mission, particularly now, as a new generation of wartime veterans enters the civilian and VA world.

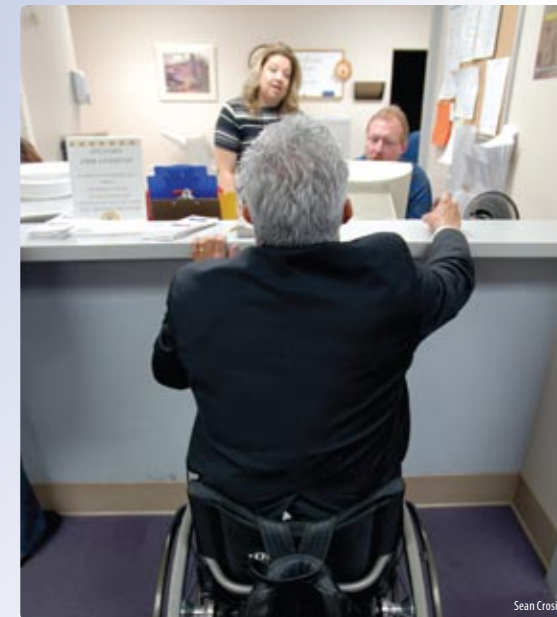
Following are Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation issues of high priority to The American Legion:

Access to VA Health Care. VA has undergone a well-documented evolution in the past 25 years, dramatically increasing quality of care beyond that of the private or public sectors. An equally well-documented problem, however, is access to that high-quality care. Access to VA care is restricted in many ways, including:

- **Denial of VA health care to veterans of certain demographic characteristics.** The continued budget-driven suspension of Priority Group 8 veterans from new enrollment in the VA health-care system defies the spirit and intention of the Veterans Health Care Eligibility Reform Act of 1996 and denies access to the population of veterans most likely to contribute to the cost of their own care. Among those Priority Group 8

veterans are many with service-connected disabilities who are denied enrollment.

- **New VA facilities await construction in many areas of veteran population growth.** The Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) decision of 2004 identified urgent needs across the country for new VA hospitals and clinics in areas of fast veteran population growth. Four years later, only a fraction of those construction projects are funded and actually under way.
- **Long waiting times for appointments drive away veterans in overburdened VA markets.** Waiting times for VA doctor appointments can take months. At one point in recent years, more than 300,000 veterans were waiting 30 days or more for primary-care appointments. The waiting time to see a VA specialist is typically even more frustrating, often taking months.
- **Failure to adjudicate VA benefits claims and appeals in a timely manner denies access to veterans in need.** VA's backlog of more than 400,000 undecided claims, along with thousands of disputed decisions that have not been reconciled, denies care by delaying it.
- **VA health-care facilities must be adequately staffed with health-care providers who receive competitive compensation.** In too many markets across the country, doctor, nurse and technician shortages lead VA to seek more expensive and less efficient services from outside providers. Inadequate staffing prevents VA from keeping timely appointment schedules and drives veteran patients away in many markets.
- **Restricted access unnecessarily sends veterans to private contractors for health care formerly available to them in VA facilities.** Particularly for long-term care and mental-health services, VA increasingly relies on outside contractors who not understand the unique needs of veterans who consistently suffer from such conditions as combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, Agent Orange exposure and other service-connected problems.
- **Veterans in rural areas are often denied access by the sheer distance between their homes and the VA medical centers equipped to serve them.** Many plans have been piloted to enhance care for rural veterans, but significant improvement – aside from a recent mileage-reimbursement increase from 11 cents to 28 cents per mile – has yet to be realized. Without greater VA clinical presence in many areas of the country, access is denied to these veterans.



'A SYSTEM WORTH SAVING'

American Legion field staff research and visit VA medical facilities throughout the nation each year and produce a comprehensive assessment. The "System Worth Saving" report provides in-depth analyses of VA health-care performance in all 21 Veterans Integrated Service Networks.

The project, launched in 2002 and 2003, continues under the guidance of the Legion's System Worth Saving Task Force and the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Division.

A Better Funding Formula for VA Health Care.

The discretionary process of funding the Veterans Health Administration is flawed because it fails to match actual dollars with actual demand. This breakdown has led to numerous emergency funding actions by Congress and has left VA without any new budget at all to begin a new fiscal year for over a decade. VA must be funded on the basis of real cost, without burdening veterans on fixed incomes by doubling deductibles and installing new enrollment fees that do not guarantee timely access to care. VA administrators must be given workable budgets to begin their fiscal year; the practice of running VA health-care facilities on questionable cost estimates in multiple continuing resolutions must cease. Enrollment fees are paid through honorable military service, not out of veterans' pockets, as a hedge against a miscalculated discretionary budget. New patient enrollment fees and dramatic co-payment increases are not viable options to balance VA's medical-care budget.



The American Legion supports:

- A mandatory funding formula for VA health care, based on dollars per patient, indexed annually for inflation.
- The authorization of VA to collect Medicare reimbursements for services provided to enrolled, Medicare-qualified, non-service-connected veterans, similar to the authorization granted to other Indian Health Services and TRICARE for Life.
- The reinstatement of Priority Group 8 veterans and improved performance standards in collections from their insurance companies.
- Protection from a doubling of prescription co-payments and/or the introduction of annual VA health-care enrollment fees.



James V. Carroll

THE LEGION'S NETWORK OF SERVICE OFFICERS

The American Legion maintains a network of approximately 1,700 professional, accredited representatives – known also as service officers or department service officers – who are officially recognized by VA to provide representation and assistance to veterans and their dependents. The service is provided free of charge, regardless of membership.

The American Legion National Headquarters also maintains fully staffed offices of professional appeals representatives at VA's Board of Veterans Appeals and Appeals Management Center. National appeals representatives at the BVA and AMC provide direct representation to veterans and survivors whose claims are denied at the regional office level and then appealed.

The American Legion also works with the National Veterans Legal Services Program, a nonprofit veterans law firm and consultant to The American Legion and the Veterans Consortium, to ensure that Legion-represented claims denied by the BVA have access to the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.

- A mandate to give VA health-care facility administrators the budgets they need at the beginning of each fiscal year.

Veterans With Special Needs. The American Legion strongly supports efforts to improve services, advance research and deliver compassionate treatment to veterans with special needs, such as:

- Those who have become homeless since discharge.
- Those who suffer from traumatic brain injuries and/or mental illness.
- Those who have suffered multiple combat injuries, defined as "polytrauma."
- Those who battle with conditions related to Agent Orange exposure, Gulf War illness, radiation exposure due to atomic testing, mustard-gas exposure and other medical problems linked, or presumably linked, to military service.

The Legion specifically urges VA and Congress to fund and adequately staff a greater number of Vet Centers around the country, which provide mental health and occupational outreach to thousands of veterans who otherwise look to the VA medical system for help, or who end up on the street.

The Legion also supports recommendations from the President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors to enhance focus on traumatic brain injury and PTSD among veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. The Legion also supports new VA polytrauma centers across the country to manage unique problems faced by OIF and OEF combat veterans.

Career Opportunities for Veterans. Job and education opportunities are pushed aside to make time for military service. Career advancement and college educations are often delayed. For some veterans returning to civilian life with physical disabilities or personal problems, such a transition can be daunting. The Legion's Economic Division, a major part of the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation pillar, works specifically in that area.

A GI Bill for a New Century. The American Legion worked closely with Congress to help pass a new GI Bill last summer. However, many veterans do not fully understand the education benefit and how it can help them. The Legion is now working on an outreach effort to provide information.

Employment and Business. The American Legion actively participates in numerous acts of outreach for veterans seeking employment or business opportunities after military service. The Legion aggressively lobbies for veterans preference laws and compliance with laws designed to provide incentives for disabled-veteran entrepreneurship. Similarly, the Legion's Economic Division assists in job and career fairs throughout the country and works to protect the careers and benefits of reservists and National Guardsmen during military deployments.

Heroes to Hometowns. The American Legion's Heroes to Hometowns program helps severely injured U.S. servicemembers successfully transition back into their communities and civilian lives. Technically a national program, Heroes to Hometowns, or H2H, cannot work without the grassroots efforts of American Legion posts.

The American Legion works closely with DoD and VA to identify veterans in need and provide readjustment help and mentoring at the local level.

Final Respects. The American Legion works closely with the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), Arlington National Cemetery, and other federal and state governments and entities to ensure a proper burial for all veterans as well as honorable burial services for the veteran, the family of the veteran, and other loved ones. The Legion also serves as a major coordinator of the Missing in America Project, which ensures that cremated remains of veterans, long forgotten in funeral homes, hospitals and other establishments, are respectfully laid to rest. The American Legion provides a large portion of the Missing in America Project's volunteers.



Steve Brooks

CAREERS FOR VETERANS

The American Legion's Economic Division and the Legion's Veterans Small Business Task Force actively pursue new career opportunities for veterans through job fairs and business workshops across the country. The American Legion has formal partnerships with RecruitMilitary, LLC, Avue Technologies and Military.com, a subsidiary of Monster.com, to participate in a robust schedule of career fairs throughout the year.

The Legion also has aggressively lobbied for improved compliance of laws that require no less than 3 percent of federal contracts be awarded to businesses owned by service-disabled veterans, along with other opportunities for veteran entrepreneurs.

www.vetjobs.us

www.military.com

www.recruitmilitary.com

American Legion Economic Division
(202) 861-2700, ext. 1514

BACKLOG OF PENDING VBA CLAIMS CREATES VETERAN JOB OPPORTUNITIES

The backlog of pending Veterans Benefits Administration claims, as of June 28, 2008, had reached 633,277. Of those, 390,933 were rating cases. Since the end of 2004, when 321,458 rating cases were pending, the backlog has grown.

Between 2006 and 2007, the number of pending ratings cases increased by about 14,000. Over 25 percent of the cases were pending for longer than 180 days. At the end of fiscal 2007, the average number of days to complete a claim from date of receipt was 182.5 days, up 5.4 days from the previous year.

Inadequate staffing levels, lack of continuing education, and increased pressure to make quick decisions result in

an overall decrease in quality of work. These are among the most common complaints raised by regional office employees interviewed by American Legion staff during regional office quality checks. It is unrealistic to expect VA, with current staffing levels, to continue to process an ever-increasing workload while maintaining quality and timeliness.

The current wartime situation provides an excellent opportunity for VA to actively seek out returning veterans from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, especially those with service-connected disabilities, for employment opportunities within VBA.



THE AMERICAN LEGION'S POSITIONS ON THE DOLE-SHALALA REPORT

The February 2007 exposure of unsanitary conditions in an outpatient facility operated by Walter Reed Army Medical Center led to national outrage.

The American Legion responded swiftly by coordinating with DoD to install a service officer on post to provide transition assistance, including representation before military evaluation boards.

The facility in question, Building 18, was largely occupied by service personnel awaiting medical discharge decisions when the unsanitary conditions were exposed.

The exposure also led to the appointment of former U.S. Sen. Robert Dole and former U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala to lead a presidential commission to study the problem and make recommendations.

The President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors produced six recommendations to improve the process for wounded and ill personnel.

The American Legion generally agrees with the commission's philosophy and intention, although some recommendations require further study and clarification.

Recommendation: Create a patient-centered recovery plan that provides the right care and support at the right time in the right place, for every seriously injured servicemember, through a corps of well-trained recovery coordinators around the country.

The American Legion position: Servicemembers and their dependents can be overwhelmed dealing with the bureaucracies of multiple government departments or agencies. Having one point of contact for all their needs is a step in the right direction, but it is also important to involve existing transition programs offered by DoD, VA, the military and veterans service organizations.

Recommendation: Restructure the disability and compensation system to better coordinate DoD and VA. This can be accomplished by updating and simplifying the disability determination and compensation system, eliminating parallel activities, reducing inequities, and providing a solid base for injured veterans to resume productive lives.

The American Legion positions: VA has a backlog of undecided claims and appeals that will not be relieved until adequate staffing is provided.

The disability examination process, as proposed, would be under sole control of DoD. VA would then assign disability ratings without any input in the medical examination process, creating potential for conflicts.

Any intent to diminish VA's ratings system – which effectively centers on lost economic and career opportunity – would be strongly opposed.

If VA disability compensation leads to forfeited Social Security benefits, the Legion strongly opposes it.

Transition payments should not be considered compensation. They are bridge payments that would be an additional benefit to compensation.

Claimants, under this recommendation, have limited opportunity to appeal DoD medical decisions.

A periodic-review requirement for VA to re-evaluate every three years every veteran whose condition is not classified as permanent and total in nature will strain an already-burdened system.

Recommendation: Aggressive prevention and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury.

The American Legion position: Full agreement.

Recommendation: Significantly strengthen family-support programs including expanding DoD respite care and extending the Family and Medical Leave Act for up to six months for spouses and parents of the seriously injured.

The American Legion position: The American Legion agrees with the intent of this recommendation and its goals but would add that the benefits must be expanded to include all military personnel who suffer severe injuries, not just those wounded in combat. The American Legion also recommends closely evaluated six-month extensions to accommodate service personnel whose recoveries require more time.

Recommendation: Rapidly transfer patient information between DoD and VA to get clinical and benefit data to users as soon as possible. In addition, DoD and VA should jointly develop an interactive "My eBenefits" Web site that provides a single information source for servicemembers.

The American Legion position: Numerous hearings and millions of dollars have been applied since 2000 to the need for DoD and VA to share critical medical information on patients being seen or transferred out. The American Legion has repeatedly supported the unfettered transfer of medical records between DoD and VA. The American Legion supports a "My eBenefits" site but adds that more direct coordination is needed beyond a shared Web site.

Recommendation: Strongly support Walter Reed Army Medical Center by recruiting and retaining first-rate professionals through 2011 when it closes and is moved to Bethesda, Md.

The American Legion position: The American Legion opposes the closing of Walter Reed Army Medical Center and urges its full funding to ensure the best possible care for servicemembers.



THE LEGION'S ROLE AT WALTER REED

Legionnaire and U.S. Marine Corps veteran Jerry Johnson plays a critical and evolving role at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington. In March 2007, The American Legion and DoD signed a memorandum of understanding that gave Johnson an office on the hospital campus and a mission to help military men and women through the transition into civilian and VA life.

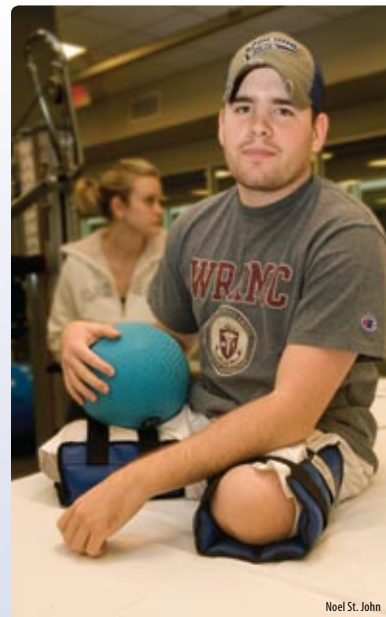
Since then, Johnson has connected hundreds of wounded and sick servicemembers and newly disabled veterans with resources that can help them in their communities, services like The American Legion's nationwide Heroes to Hometowns program. The American Legion staff position on post gives the organization personal access to men and women who need help with such

concerns as medical evaluations, discharge reviews and employment opportunities after separation.

The agreement between DoD and The American Legion was reached after unsanitary conditions at Building 18, an outpatient facility near the Walter Reed campus, were exposed in the media. The facility provided residential care for military personnel in the out-processing transition to their civilian lives.

Johnson, a trained and Legion-certified veterans service officer, meets regularly with military personnel, one-on-one and in group settings, to alert them to the resources and opportunities available as they prepare to return home.

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Noel St. John

DISABILITY BENEFITS REFORM

The American Legion has persistently fought for improvements to VA's disability claims backlog, the ratings process, and the general disconnect between DoD and VA in terms of medical evaluation and disability evaluation. The independent Veterans Disability Benefits Commission evaluated and assessed veterans benefits provided under the law and provided 113 recommendations for improvement. Here are some of the recommendations and American Legion positions on them:

Recommendation: Update the current rating schedule and keep it up to date.

The American Legion position: The American Legion agrees that, although most major aspects in the rating schedule have been updated over the years, a substantial revision is needed. However, the current rating schedule is not the cause of all major problems with the VA disability compensation process.

Recommendation: VA should develop and implement new criteria specific to post-traumatic stress disorder in the VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities. VA should base those criteria on The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders and should consider a multidimensional framework for characterizing disability due to PTSD.

The American Legion position: The American Legion strongly supports this recommendation.

Recommendation: Improve claims-processing cycle time by establishing

a simplified and expedited process for well-documented claims, using best business practices and maximum feasible use of information technology, and implementing an expedited process by which the claimant can state the claim information is complete and waive the time period (60 days) allowed for further development. Congress should mandate and provide appropriate resources to reduce the VA claims backlog by 50 percent within two years.

The American Legion position: The American Legion opposes this recommendation. The imposition of arbitrary deadlines can often over-simplify cases and lead to a sacrifice of quality.

Recommendation: Congress should increase compensation rates up to 25 percent as an interim and baseline future benefit for loss of quality of life, pending development and implementation of a quality-of-life measure in the rating schedule.

The American Legion position:

The American Legion supports an increase in compensation benefits to adequately account for a service-connected disability's impact on a veteran's quality of life.

Recommendation: Congress should eliminate the ban on concurrent receipt for all military retirees and for all those who separated from the military due to service-connected disabilities. Priority should be given to veterans who separated or retired from the military under Chapter 61 with fewer than 20 years of service and a service-connected disability rating greater than 50 percent, or disability as the result of combat.

The American Legion position:

The American Legion strongly supports full concurrent receipt of both military retirement pay and VA disability compensation for those who qualify for both.



PILLAR II: NATIONAL SECURITY



To those who have sworn with their lives to protect the United States against enemies near and far, national security is a deeply held value. The terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, exposed this nation's vulnerabilities and magnified the importance of this value not only for military veterans, but for all Americans. The American Legion has, since 9/11, passed national resolutions supporting and reconfirming its support for the global war on terrorism and for all who have critical responsibilities in it: the administration; the Congress; the departments of Defense, State and Homeland Security; and, foremost, the troops and civilians fighting to keep acts of terrorism from occurring again on U.S. soil.

The American Legion's national-security position is multifaceted. Key aspects 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 urging its steadfast protection of U.S. borders, ports and other points of access; a decent quality of life for troops and their families – active-duty and reserve-component alike – that includes reasonable compensation, benefits, health care, child care, and family-support programs; and an efficient and compassionate healing and transition program for wounded and ill warriors.

The American Legion includes more than 14,000 posts around the world and actively assists veterans and families of military personnel. They work closely on transitions back to civilian and community life, using the VA health-care system,

U.S. Marine Corps

TRICARE or TRICARE for Life. The American Legion represents military members during the medical discharge process and assists in their pursuit of education benefits, employment counseling, training, and health care.

Also within the Legion's national-security pillar is a Foreign Relations Commission that works closely with the Department of State to seek peaceful solutions to various world conflicts and to advance U.S. foreign policy around the globe.

The American Legion's national-security positions include:

A Strong National Defense. The American Legion recommends an increase in U.S. defense spending to levels that represent at least 5 percent of gross domestic product to include pay raises for military personnel that keep pace with cost-of-living increases and close the gap between military and private-sector pay.

The Legion recommends that federal funding be provided to strengthen the Navy's ship-building program; to develop the Army's future combat systems; to build Air Force fighters, tankers and specialty aircraft; develop a national missile-defense system and cyberspace defense program; and to support NASA for dominance in space. The Legion urges DoD to use U.S. companies whenever possible for military procurement.

Greater military force end strength, from 1.4 million to 2.1 million, is recommended to reduce stress on the reserve components and National Guard, decrease the number of extended deployments, and better position the United States in the event of a sudden national-security threat outside the Iraq and Afghanistan war theaters.

The American Legion also supports a new U.S. military command devoted solely to African issues – AFRICOM – shipboard or in fixed headquarters on the continent.

The Legion also continues its ongoing support for the Selective Service registration process.

Military Quality of Life. Disabled military retirees earned and deserve full concurrent receipt of their DoD retirement pay and their VA disability compensation, which come from separate budgets, for separate purposes. Today, most disabled military retirees are forced to choose one or the other in what has become known as the "disabled veterans tax."

Military health-care programs must be fully funded without additional enrollment fees or copayment increases for beneficiaries. TRICARE



THE AMERICAN LEGION AND DISASTER READINESS

In many communities throughout the nation, The American Legion plays an active role in local homeland-security efforts. In the aftermath of the hurricanes and floods that devastated the Gulf Coast in 2005, and tornadoes that destroyed entire towns in the Midwest in 2008, American Legion posts became emergency shelters for families and even served as makeshift medical facilities.

American Legion posts work closely with municipal leaders to develop emergency plans, kits and checklists in the event of natural disaster or attack. The American Legion is affiliated with Citizen Corps and hundreds of local disaster-readiness programs.

coverage should be made permanent for members of the reserve components, as well.

Military personnel who sustain injuries or illnesses while on duty must be given fair and timely discharge processing, and their transition to civilian life and/or VA health care made seamless. The American Legion strongly supports a continuum of care for disabled veterans after they re-integrate to civilian life. The Legion encourages swift and efficient action to integrate various federal departments, agencies and programs to improve the transition process and sustain that continuum of care.



THE LEGION IN IRAQ

ANMCGAF Post 383 in Old Town, Fla., chartered in 2004 and named in honor of all five branches of the military, is becoming a home for the newest generation of Legionnaires. Post 383 Commander Chris Christians says his nephew – Sgt. 1st Class Curtis Christians, an Army paratrooper stationed near Baghdad – has recruited about 20 new American Legion members from the 2nd Battalion, 69th Infantry unit.

"I think it's a great idea to talk to these guys now and get them interested in the Legion," says Christians, a 23-year Marine Corps veteran who served two tours of duty in Vietnam. "People say to wait until they come home and then ask them to join. I say, why wait? Why not sign them up now if we can? They need to know what The American Legion can do for them and what we're doing elsewhere."



Homeland Security. The threat of terrorist attacks or other catastrophic disasters in the United States came painfully to light on Sept. 11, 2001, and following 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 assure a well-funded and efficient Department of Homeland Security is prepared for any eventuality.

Since the Department of Homeland Security's creation after the terrorist attacks of 2001, The American Legion has supported its intent, purpose and arrangement: to harmonize myriad agencies, offices, businesses, community groups and others with readiness responsibilities and quick-response capabilities. The American Legion is an active contributor to that synergy, on the local and national levels. The Legion concurs with the DHS mission to coordinate domestic security, including effective customs operations and drug interdiction.

To help with that effort, the Legion supports funding for the U.S. Coast Guard's "Deepwater"

initiatives to rebuild its fleet and modernize assets to more effectively fulfill responsibilities in maritime safety, law enforcement, homeland security, environmental protection and defense.

Foreign Relations. The American Legion encourages increased federal funding for foreign relations and international affairs and for the Department of State's continuous effort to seek peaceful and diplomatic solutions to world conflicts, as well as the DoS initiative for creation of the Civilian Response Corps, for deployment before, during or after military campaigns.

Full Accounting of POW/MIAs. A sacred value of The American Legion is the full accounting and repatriation of fallen U.S. service personnel. The Legion supports Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command activities to locate and repatriate all recoverable remains of U.S. military personnel who have fallen or are missing in foreign battle zones.

THE LEGION'S HELPING HAND

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita will forever be associated with tragedy. But amid the disastrous storm season that battered the Gulf Coast in 2005, the horrific weather also produced tale after tale of Legionnaires fulfilling the final clause of the preamble to the organization's constitution: "to consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness."

Post 250 in Fowl River, Ala., and Post 271 in Kaplan, La., were among numerous American Legion facilities across the storm-slammed region to serve as collection and distribution points for food, clothing and other aid to evacuees.

Other posts, such as Dr. O.S. Holiday Memorial Post 27 in DeRidder, La., served as emergency shelters for evacuees. Commander Bill Lofton shut down the Post 27 bingo hall and welcomed 41 new residents displaced by the hurricanes. Legion volunteers cooked, fed and clothed their guests, even transporting diabetic patients to and from the local hospital for treatment. One post was converted into a makeshift kidney dialysis center.

In addition to that support, more than \$2.1 million in National Emergency Fund cash grants was awarded to more than 2,500 Legion families affected by the 2005 Gulf Coast hurricanes.



James V. Carroll



Regis Bossu

OPERATION LANDSTUHL

Past American Legion National Commander Paul A. Morin and other top officials in the Legion family toured Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany last year and came away wanting "to make sure every patient had all the comfort items we could provide. I asked the Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion if they would join me in raising \$50,000." In just over a month, Operation Landstuhl raised \$257,000, and \$320,000 by the end of 2007.

The donations bought TVs, phone cards, iPods, laptop computers, DVD players, billiard and ping-pong tables, Sony PlayStations, iTunes cards, clothing and books. All donated dollars went to patient items.

SUPPORT FOR THE TROOPS



Brandi Simons

The American Legion conducts thousands of troop-support activities every day across the United States. At small-town posts, Legionnaires and American Legion Auxiliary members prepare care packages and raise money for phone cards and even GPS navigation systems for troops to use in theater. In major cities, Legionnaires coordinate massive welcome-home and support celebrations. When members of the armed forces need support, or even simple acknowledgement of a job well done, The American Legion is there.

Example: Thanks largely to The American Legion's Department of Oklahoma, last Christmas actually felt like Christmas for soldiers in the 45th Infantry Brigade of the Oklahoma National Guard. They enjoyed 10 days at home in late December, thanks to the department's Operation Holiday Homecoming. Legionnaires there sponsored a massive effort that gave more than 2,000 mobilized soldiers a chance to enjoy the holidays with their families before returning to Fort Bliss,

Texas, for final pre-deployment training before departing for the Middle East.

More than 40 buses transported soldiers from Fort Bliss to Oklahoma City, Tulsa and McAlester. Soldiers enjoyed a week with their families and friends before finally returning to training Jan. 2.

Gen. Myles Deering, who deployed with the brigade, offered a glowing review of the Oklahoma Legion's Operation Holiday Homecoming. "It's impossible to describe how much this meant to these men and women in uniform," he said. "The American Legion and the state of Oklahoma did a tremendous job."

Example: Veterans at American Legion Post 351 in Fort Myers, Fla., partnered with others in the community to provide wounded soldiers from Fort Gordon a break from hospital life, including free lodging provided by the local Hampton Inn & Suites, free meals, fishing trips and a spa visit. The wounded troops were also recognized by the unfurling of a U.S. Flag large enough to extend across a six-lane highway.

Example: In March 2007, Post 78 in Hyde Park, Mass., adopted an entire National Guard regiment. The Massachusetts National Guard's Headquarters and Headquarters Battery 1st Battalion, 101st Field Artillery Regiment deployed to Iraq in 2006. "I asked how many people were in the regiment," Post 78 Commander John Moran said. "I thought it would be great if we could take care of all 152 of these people." More than \$7,500 was raised to purchase toiletries, DVDs, snacks and suntan lotion, along with various other comfort items. The post also helped organized a homecoming dinner and ceremony. "We call ourselves 'the little post that can,'" Moran said. "Small in numbers, but we're big enough to get things done."



The Blue Star Service Banner was designed and patented in 1917 by World War I Army Capt. Robert L. Queissner of the 5th Ohio Infantry. It quickly became an unofficial symbol to identify a home with a loved one at war. The American Legion resurrected the Blue Star Banner program after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and American Legion posts donate them to families across the country.



A LEGACY OF AMERICAN LEGION SERVICE



***TOP:** Legionnaires have been at the bedsides of wounded and sick veterans since the end of World War I when disabled veterans were often institutionalized in asylums. The Legion helped create the Veterans Administration.*

***BOTTOM:** President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly regarded as the most significant piece of social legislation in the 20th century.*

The American Legion, today comprising 2.7 million wartime veterans, was chartered by the U.S. Congress in 1919, and was founded by men and women who served in the armed forces of the United States during World War I.

Among the first to be exposed to modern warfare with its poisonous gases, overlaying fields of machine-gun fire, trench warfare, tanks and artillery, these soldiers, sailors and Marines suffered both the mental and physical wounds of war.

When the armistice was announced on Nov. 11, 1918, they came home to parades, but little else. There was no comprehensive medical care, no disability compensation, no vocational training, no effective treatment for shell shock, and no pensions for widows and orphans.

The men and women who had won the Great War were expected to come home as if nothing had happened and to pick up where they had left off. They were expected to get on with their lives with little or no assistance from the government whose call they had answered.

This fledgling American Legion, conceived primarily by Theodore Roosevelt Jr., took on the mission to follow Lincoln's postbellum call for America to "care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan." Working through a fast-multiplying network of community posts, The American Legion became the nation's largest self-help organization. The Legion established tuberculosis hospitals, found employment for veterans, established a program of monetary grants to assist widows and orphans, and assisted those suffering from the mental wounds of war.

In 1923, The American Legion conducted a nationwide survey to ascertain how World War I veterans were



readjusting to civilian life. What the Legion survey revealed shocked the nation.

Some veterans of the Great War were homeless, many suffered from what we know today as PTSD, and not a few were housed in jails, mental institutions and county homes. Too many had given up on life, and had no hope and no future. It was not uncommon to see former doughboys, without arms or legs, selling apples and pencils on the street corners of our nation, just trying to survive.

The public outcry was loud and clear. The result was the creation of the Veterans Bureau, an entity that consolidated under one roof the services of many government agencies that had a small piece of the rehabilitation pie. Today, that bureau is known as the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Federal and state laws were enacted, based on the Legion's advice that had been gathered from thousands of service officers who were working with veterans and their families – one on one – in the communities where they lived.

Those laws brought compensation for veterans who had suffered service-connected disabilities. They built a nationwide system of veterans hospitals and clinics and established veterans homes, veterans cemeteries, and pensions for the surviving spouses of those who had given their lives for our country.

Thanks in no small part to the diligence and vision of The American Legion, shell shock has been re-diagnosed as post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD; exposure to Agent Orange is now a recognized service-connected disability due to a study conducted by The American Legion and Columbia University; and veterans suffering from mesothelioma, cancer resulting from exposure to asbestos, and illness due to exposure to ionizing radiation, and its resulting cancers, are now recognized as having service-connected disabilities. This list is long and grows longer each year.

Most, if not all, of these conditions were called to the attention of our government due to the Legion's work with veterans through its Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission.

The American Legion's founders envisioned a future of honor, respect and prosperity for military veterans and the nation they vowed to protect and defend. That vision inspired the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, today known as the GI Bill. The American Legion is recognized as the organization that wrote and created the bill. Ironically, it passed the conference committee of the House and Senate by only one



American Legion members today work closely with active military installations to provide support and stay connected.

vote, and yet has come to be known as the greatest piece of social legislation ever conceived, triggering a half-century of American economic prosperity.

The American Legion still believes in the vision of our founders, a vision for a strong America – freedom and opportunity. And The American Legion firmly believes that veterans and their families have earned every benefit awarded to them by a grateful nation because of their selfless service. Indeed, this basic principle was succinctly written into law when the Supreme Court stated in 1983:

"It is ... not irrational for Congress to decide that, even though it will not subsidize substantial lobbying by charities generally, it will subsidize lobbying by veterans organizations. Veterans have 'been obliged to drop their own affairs and take up the burdens of the nation, subjecting themselves to the mental and physical hazards as well as the economic and family detriments which are peculiar to military service and which do not exist in normal civil life.' Our country has a longstanding policy of compensating veterans for their past contributions by providing them numerous advantages. This policy has 'always been deemed to be legitimate.'"

This special report in *The American Legion Magazine* was produced on behalf of our membership, the wartime veterans of the 20th and the 21st century, who can be found in thousands of communities across our great nation.

This is their vision for a strong America.



PILLAR III: AMERICANISM



Many cultural, moral and patriotic values have come under serious attack in the United States in recent years. Prayer has been removed from schools. The U.S. Flag is no longer protected from anarchists. Boy Scouts of America faces serious legal duels in the communities it serves. The institution of marriage is under siege. Immigration laws are defied. References to God have been challenged on U.S. currency, in the Pledge of Allegiance and in the public square, all by a minority of voices whose vision for America is far different from that of our founding fathers. Our nation's very identity is at stake as more and more values are driven toward extinction.

As an organization dedicated to God and country, with a membership of military veterans that takes deep pride in the U.S. Flag and all it means, The American Legion has always been a stalwart champion of patriotism, morality and citizenship.

Upon the pillar of Americanism is The American Legion's devotion to law and order, the raising of wholesome youth, respectful observance of patriotic holidays and remembrances, education and law-abiding citizenship.

Among The American Legion's highest Americanism priorities in the 2008 election year are:

U.S. Flag Protection. The U.S. Constitution should be amended to add the following: "The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States."

The American Legion joins all the states and an overwhelming majority of citizens in its position that the American flag deserves legal protection from acts of intentional public physical desecration. In 1989, the U.S. Supreme Court declared flag desecration to be a "right" protected by the First Amendment of the Constitution. The American

Legion disagreed then and reaffirms now that flag desecration is a form of conduct – not speech – that can and should be regulated by law.

All 50 state legislatures have petitioned Congress for a constitutional amendment that would give power to Congress to prohibit such conduct. Poll after poll show that upwards of 80 percent of Americans support flag protection. Lopsided majorities in both houses of Congress have supported a flag amendment, the House of Representatives having passed such a proposed amendment in six consecutive votes; the measure has fallen just slightly short of achieving super-majority in the Senate, leaving it just one vote short of passing in the 109th Congress. As a symbol of our nation, the U.S. Flag belongs to the people, who should be given the power to protect it. The American Legion's position on its protection is inviolate.

Illegal Immigration. The American Legion supports manageable, legal immigration. By multiple resolutions that determine policy, the Legion adamantly opposes illegal immigration, amnesty for those who illegally enter the United States and ineffective measures to prevent illegal border crossing, particularly during a time of war.

The Legion's strategy to combat illegal immigration calls for strong border security, including physical barriers and high-tech surveillance methods; the elimination of economic and social-services benefits for illegal immigrants; employer sanctions against those who knowingly hire illegal immigrants; and the enforcement of existing immigration laws. The Legion also supports new laws that deny illegal immigrants driver's licenses, establish parameters for non-criminal deportation, and designate English as the official language of the U.S. government. The Legion's position on illegal immigration seeks elimination of the visa lottery program, the creation of new visa categories for agricultural workers to replace those who are working illegally, and authority to track foreign visitors to include college students, press, and members of any foreign diplomatic corps.

Illegal immigration stands as one of the most serious problems facing America, with as many as 20 million illegal immigrants inside our borders and billions of dollars spent providing social services, education and jobs for them. The American Legion supports the law on this matter and strongly urges the U.S. government to enforce it.

Voter Registration and Participation. The American Legion connects good government with active citizen participation in the electoral process. Legion posts throughout the country offer their services and facilities to stimulate registration and turnout at the polls. Posts also provide facilities and opportunities for non-partisan voter-education forums and debates. Under the provisions of its federal charter, it is important to note, The American Legion is prohibited from supporting, opposing or providing aid to any political party or any candidate for public office.

Boy Scouts of America. The American Legion vigorously opposes attempts to strip the Boy Scouts of public support, sponsorship and facility space due to the organization's membership or leadership criteria. The Scouts teach skills, build character, and provide a healthy and wholesome outlet for young Americans. The organization should not be punished or persecuted for acknowledging God in its oath or for setting leadership restrictions based on a moral code that the majority of Americans endorse.

The Pledge of Allegiance. Recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance by students and teachers in our nation's schools should be a regular part of school activities and events. In support of keeping "under God" in the pledge, The American Legion affirms that pledging allegiance to the flag is the voluntary offering of a patriotic oath to the nation; that no one should be denied this opportunity; and that the removal of these words will set a precedent that questions the propriety of numerous references to a supreme being in historical documents, on currency and on many of our government buildings, to include the U.S. Supreme Court.

Establishment-Clause Lawsuits. The American Legion is dedicated to combating the secular cleansing of our American heritage, performed by lawsuits that attack the Boy Scouts, the public display of the Ten Commandments and other symbols of America's religious history. The authority given by Congress to the courts to impose damages, or attorney fees, in establishment-clause cases is being used by the American Civil Liberties Union and others to compel municipalities, state and federal agencies, along with private groups, to cast off religious association, often in pursuit of tax-funded attorney fees.



AMERICAN LEGION BASEBALL

Many of the greatest names in the sport spent their teenage summers in American Legion Baseball uniforms. Hall of Famers such as Dave Winfield, Rolie Fingers, Reggie Jackson and Stan Musial still speak of the influence Legion ball had on their lives and careers.

Each year, nearly 100,000 athletes participate in American Legion Baseball, the nation's oldest and most respected amateur baseball program. Posts sponsor teams in all

50 states and Puerto Rico, giving young men wholesome, healthy activity and lessons in sportsmanship, loyalty, respect for rules and fair play.

"I was proud to wear The American Legion uniform because it was the first uniform I had," remembered Stan "The Man" Musial. "The American Legion has supported baseball for many years, and it has an outstanding program for our young players."



THE AMERICAN LEGION LEGACY RUN

"My dad had an impact on my life that no one else could have on me. He was so many things to me; he was my support, my guide, my confidant and my comfort. Losing him was the worst thing that I have ever had happen in my life. I would like to honor him and would like to make him and my family proud by achieving my goals. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to make this happen."

The words of a college student whose military father lost his life after the tragic terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, demonstrate just how important it is to live up to one of The American Legion's – and our nation's – most important obligations.

Within weeks of the attacks, The American Legion Legacy Scholarship was established to help young people whose parents have lost their lives serving in the armed forces in the years following 9/11. Children of U.S. military personnel killed at war are entitled to receive federal money toward their college educations, but these funds do not cover the entire cost, and the gap widens as college tuitions and expenses continue to climb. It is especially difficult for a single parent to afford.

The goal of The American Legion Legacy Scholarship fund is \$20 million, enough to fund college educations for young people years from now, through earnings on the principal.

To reach that goal, The American Legion relies heavily on one of its most popular and fast-growing programs: The American Legion Riders.

Motorcycle-riding veterans from across the country have joined the Legion Riders for annual cross-country treks, raising funds while riding from Indianapolis to national conventions in Salt Lake City, Reno, Nev., and Phoenix. The rides have raised more than \$1 million for the scholarship program, which is already distributing scholarship dollars while simultaneously building up the principal.

Legion Riders chapters have flourished in recent years and became an official program of the organization in 2007. It has since expanded to more than 800 chapters.

www.legion.org/programs/legacyrun/overview
www.americanlegionriders.net



AMERICAN LEGION BOYS NATION

Presidents, governors, members of Congress and local community servants are among thousands of young men who learned the way the U.S. government works by participating in American Legion Boys Nation.

Boys Nation participants are selected from Boys State programs across the country. Each delegate represents his state as a senator. An intense week of training and education in the legislative

process also includes tours of Washington monuments and memorials, along with an occasional visit from the president.

Boys Nation began in 1946 at American University in Washington. Boys State began in 1935 in Illinois as an effort to counter fascist youth camps springing up around the country at the time. At Boys State, high-school juniors learn the rights, privileges and responsibilities of a franchised citizen.



TEMPORARY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Michael Junkins shipped out to Iraq on the USS *Bulkeley* in February 2004, leaving his wife Sabrina and their 4-year-old daughter Cassie behind in Virginia.

Three days later, the Junkins' furnace broke down during one of the state's coldest winters. A replacement would cost the family \$8,000. Sabrina pulled together most of the money, but not all. The answer to the family's crisis came in the form of The American Legion's Temporary Financial Assistance program, which helps military and veteran families with minor children at home.

Jerry Howard, the Department of Virginia's Children & Youth chairman, was able to secure \$2,300 through TFA to cover the remaining cost.

Through TFA, a local American Legion post can call upon the national organization for cash assistance to help meet basic needs of veterans' children.

Funding for TFA comes through The American Legion Endowment Fund. In 2007, nearly 1,200 children were helped by the fund, amounting to more than \$562,100 in disbursements from National Headquarters.



FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORK

The American Legion's Family Support Network is ready to provide immediate assistance to U.S. military personnel and their families whose lives have been directly affected by the war on terrorism.

As National Guardsmen and reserve units are mobilized in record numbers, the families of these men and women often find themselves unable to meet normal monthly expenses and needing assistance for a variety of everyday chores like grocery shopping, child care, mowing the grass, fixing the car and other routine household jobs.

To address these issues, The American Legion has a nationwide toll-free telephone number for

servicemembers and their families to call for assistance. Requests also can be made online. All inquiries are referred to The American Legion department in which the call originated. Departments relay the collected information to a local American Legion post. The local post then contacts the military servicemember or family to see how assistance can be provided locally. Since the creation of the Family Support Network during the Gulf War, thousands of American Legion posts have responded to meet these families' needs.

Posts are reminded that families in financial need with minor children are encouraged to call on the Temporary

Financial Assistance program at National Headquarters to assist. Otherwise, it is up to local posts to provide or develop the resources necessary to meet the need.

More than 2,200 requests through the Family Support Network came to National Headquarters in 2007. Most cases are handled locally without notification or involvement from the national organization. Creating an ongoing and active relationship with local military units allows posts to respond immediately when needs arise.

**www.legion.org/fsn
familysupport@legion.org
(800) 504-4098**



PILLAR IV: CHILDREN & YOUTH



The American Legion's Commission on Children & Youth manages a pillar of service guided by three main objectives: to strengthen the family unit; to support quality organizations that provide services for children and youth; and to provide communities with well-rounded programs that meet the physical, educational, emotional and spiritual needs of young people. The commission works to provide hope for children who face health, safety, discipline or home-life challenges and provides opportunities for young people to succeed.

The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation provides more than \$500,000 in grants to nonprofit organizations each year that work to improve the

lives of young people. These grants have aided organ-donor campaigns, supported efforts to help military children cope with deployment or loss of a parent, and funded projects that increased public awareness of Huntington's Disease, autism, Reyes Syndrome, meningitis, spina bifida, diabetes, cancer and other conditions.

The Commission on Children & Youth has focused recent attention on several important national programs, including the Children's Miracle Network, Ronald McDonald House Charities, Special Olympics, youth suicide prevention, Halloween safety, Family Support Network and Temporary Financial Assistance for families of the deployed, and Operation: Military Kids, among others.

The American Legion has been a staunch supporter for the children and youth of our nation since its founding in 1919. The commitment continues today for the National Commission on Children & Youth, as it seeks to improve the well-being of all children. The key to the future of a free and prosperous country, knows every generation of veterans, is held by the children and youth of today. The Legion strongly supports traditional family values, assistance for at-risk children and activities that promote their healthy and wholesome development. While there is no way of knowing what issues will face our youth tomorrow, our survival may well depend on the quality of care, education and training that we, as parents and citizens, provide for young people today.

The American Legion's Children & Youth pillar includes positions on:

Child Pornography. The Legion opposes any attempts to weaken U.S. laws governing production, sale and distribution of pornographic materials.

Catastrophic Illness. The American Legion supports enacting legislation to financially assist families facing catastrophic illness of a child.

Intellectual Disabilities. The American Legion supports continuing research, and early intervention efforts, to prevent intellectual disabilities, to include research on the development and function of the nervous system, fetal treatments and gene therapy to correct abnormalities produced by defective genes, and early intervention programs with high-risk infants and children.

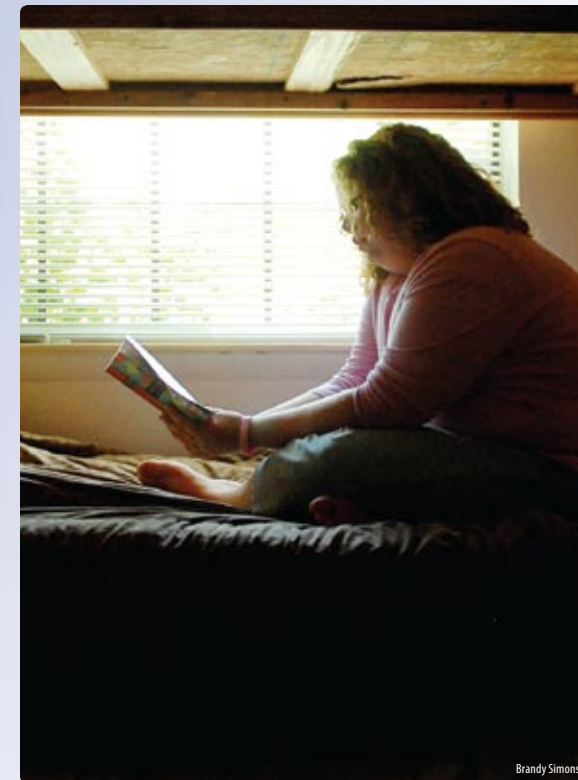
Immunization for Needy Children. The Legion urges federal funding for state and local health agencies to ensure that indigent children are afforded the opportunity to receive needed vaccines and treatments.

Family Integrity. The Legion promotes the family as the cornerstone of society and supports National Family Week in November. The Legion further recognizes that the natural family is the fundamental unit, inscribed in human nature and centered on the voluntary union of a man and woman in a lifelong covenant of marriage.

Media Violence. The American Legion supports appropriate state and federal legislation to restrict the excessive use of violence, vulgarity and immoral expressions in movies, television programs, news, video games and the Internet.

Drug Abuse. The American Legion fully supports adequate funding for all border, state, federal and military drug-trafficking prevention programs to keep illegal substances from reaching our nation's young people.

Child Sexual Exploitation. The American Legion supports appropriate legislation aimed at the prevention, investigation and prosecution of child sexual exploitation and seeks to empower the public to take immediate and direct action to enforce a zero-tolerance policy on the problem.



CHILD WELFARE FOUNDATION

Not all American children grow up with the same opportunities. Some face physical disabilities, parenting problems and even homelessness. For thousands, each day is a challenge marked by pain, prayer and perseverance. Many require specialized care. That is why The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation exists.

Established in 1954, the foundation was developed to collect donations from individuals who wished to contribute to the betterment of children in this country. To date, more than \$9 million has been awarded to organizations to support worthwhile projects through the dissemination of information to the general public and specific target groups.

In 2007, the foundation awarded grants totaling \$530,700 to 18 nonprofit organizations. Included among those grants was \$64,000 for The American Legion Children's Home at Ponca City, Okla., for the home's "American Legion Children's Home National Awareness Initiative." This grant went toward producing DVDs, brochures and a Web site in support of a national campaign to raise awareness and funds for the children's home. Other 2007 grants went to such groups as the National Autism Center, the Childhood Leukemia Foundation and Our Military Kids, Inc.

www.legion.org/cwf/

THE SAMSUNG SCHOLARSHIP

After researching dozens of veterans organizations, Samsung Group, a worldwide leader in electronics, chose The American Legion in 1995 to administer an endowed scholarship fund of \$5 million. The endowment was established to show appreciation to U.S. veterans who came to the aid of Korea during its struggle against communist forces during the Korean War. The scholarship is for undergraduate study only and may be used for tuition, books, fees, and room and board.

Seven to 10 students are chosen each year for the \$20,000 scholarships, which are awarded to direct descendants of U.S. wartime veterans.



IT'S WHO WE ARE

When Grand Dad used to say "Grandma,
I'm headed to the Legion Hall"
I thought the Legion Hall was just some
place he went
to have a beer and play some cards with all his
buddies at the bar
But I didn't know what being in the Legion meant ...
to him and all his friends
until I stood by Grand Dad's grave
said my "gone for good goodbye" ...
I swore I wouldn't cry
But one by one nearly two hundred men stepped up,
saluted him and then
they stood there at attention 'til everyone
was through
I stopped one just to ask him "Sir, is that what
you always do?" He said ...

It's not just something that we do ... It's who we are
We proudly wore the uniform and we
still do our part
Because our love for country lives not just on our lips
but deep in our hearts ...
It's not just something that we do ... It's who we are

Just before he turned to leave
He shook my hand, I grabbed his sleeve and said,
"I wish there were a lot more folks like you"
He smiled at me and said, "There are, but unless
you look real hard
chances are you'll seldom see us on the news"
"But all across the nation there are those great
patriots in civilian clothes
who've paid a price for freedom because we still
believe
the freedom our forefathers left isn't an entitlement
but it's our sacred duty to protect and serve
this land
I said, "I wish I could do something"
He said, "Son, we're all Americans and ...
It's not just something that we do ... It's who we are
We don't have to be in uniform to do our part
When our love for country lives not just on our lips
but deep in our hearts ...

It's not just something that we do ... It's who we are
From old brown shoes to desert boots
The future counts on me and you and
Who we are

Country music star Michael Peterson wrote "It's Who We Are" in honor of The American Legion. The song appears on the DVD of the same name available for purchase for \$12. Proceeds from sales are used to help fund The American Legion Legacy Scholarship fund.

<https://join.legion.org/peterson/>

American Legion National Commander Marty Conatser has belonged to Lincoln Post 102 in Deland, Ill., for 30 years. Tom Strattman

