HELP GET THE LEGION ACT PASSED

A bill expanding membership eligibility passed in the Senate; awaits House approval.

By The American Legion

Many veterans of wartime and peacetime eras alike have asked The American Legion and Congress for greater inclusion within the organization’s membership ranks. The LEGION Act (The Let Everyone Get Involved in Opportunities for National Service Act) will meet this need.

The LEGION Act is a bipartisan effort introduced Feb. 14 in the Senate and passed there by unanimous consent on June 11. The legislation would allow any veteran who served honorably under federal orders since World War II to join The American Legion.

Currently, the U.S. government recognizes only a few distinct official periods of war or armed conflict since World War II, such as Korea, Vietnam, Lebanon/Grenada/Panama and Gulf War/War on Terrorism. However, between these official periods, and during so-called “peacetime eras,” the U.S. military has been involved in frequent known armed hostilities resulting in nearly 1,600 U.S. personnel combat deaths and wounds. Yet, their sacrifices remain unrecognized as “wartime service” because these hostile events fall outside the U.S. government’s few distinct official periods of war or armed conflict.

The legislation still needs to be approved by the House of Representatives in order to extend the current recognized period of war back to Dec. 7, 1941. The American Legion is seeking such a designation for military members who honorably served their country but whose service fell in gaps between war eras.

To help get the legislation passed in the House, have your representative encourage House leadership to bring the LEGION Act (S. 504) to the floor for a vote, and to vote for this legislation to ensure all veterans are able to be recognized for their contributions and sacrifice in service to this country. Contact your member of Congress at http://capwiz.com/legion/issues/alert/?alertid=80643891.
COMMANDER’S MESSAGE

A service benefit worth fighting for

I had the opportunity to attend the Department of New Jersey’s summer convention where they welcomed “The Greatest Legislation: An American Legion Centennial Salute to the GI Bill” traveling exhibit.

The multi-media exhibit produced by the Legion’s 100th Anniversary Observance Committee has toured the nation since June 2017, sharing the story of the GI Bill. The display documents the story of the “greatest legislation,” which The American Legion originally drafted and pushed to passage in 1943 and 1944. It features illustrated panels, video kiosks and artifacts that show the dramatic story of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, the massive effects it had on U.S. society and the ongoing effort to continue improving it for new generations, through to the passage of the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 – the “Forever GI Bill.”

During my remarks to the New Jersey Legion Family, I reflected on the price U.S. military personnel have paid for the abundance of opportunities they have under the GI Bill. They paid, and continue to pay, for the GI Bill through sleepless nights induced by post-traumatic stress, through grafted skin put together after rocket attacks, through aching backs incurred after years of heavy packs and infantry gear. The truth is, our founders understood the horrors of war as soon as they experienced World War I. But others required some reminding.

Not only was this initial investment a cost of war – in other words, payment to those who gave so much – but it paled in comparison to the higher tax revenue gained from an educated working class and a housing boom that came as a result of millions of new homeowners, courtesy of the GI Bill. This is why I keep referring to the GI Bill as an investment rather than a benefit or a welfare program. It was an investment that paid off big-time. By the mid-1950s, one third of U.S. housing starts were funded by GI Bill financing.

As the years passed, the education benefit for veterans gradually diminished, setting the stage for the Post 9/11 GI Bill, passed in 2008, a major overhaul that modernized and improved the package. Since then, The American Legion has worked with Congress and VA to continue improving it and will continue to do so.

Just like The American Legion created the original GI Bill, we will fight to ensure the GI Bill indeed lasts forever and that the benefits are worthy of the GI Bill name. This is why we have an American Legion. This is what we fight for. That is who we are.

The American Legion’s GI Bill exhibit will continue to travel the nation throughout the organization’s centennial year. It will be at the 101st National Convention in Indianapolis inside the exhibit hall at the Indiana Convention Center.

MEMBERSHIP

Recruit and renew to receive commander’s ‘Membership Excellence: Team 100′ pin

American Legion National Commander Brett Reistad will award his national commander “Membership Excellence: Team 100” incentive pin to any Legion Family member who obtains three new members into The American Legion.

And as of Jan. 14, 2019, any Legion Family member who renews six American Legion members will be rewarded with the commander’s pin. Renewals received prior to Jan. 14 do not count toward this incentive.

A new member is any eligible person joining for the 2019 membership year who was not a member of The American Legion during the 2018 membership year.

Each member listed must be eligible for membership in The American Legion. Forward names of Sons of The American Legion members or Auxiliary members to your detachment or unit for use in their respective incentive programs.

Download the incentive pin forms at www.legion.org/commander/pin.
American Legion youth programs in the months of July and August involve education, competition, teamwork and citizenship – Boys Nation, Junior Shooting Sport Air Rifle Championships and Legion Baseball World Series.

In 2018, 54,788 youth came together to form 3,486 Legion Baseball teams; 18,241 young men participated in 50 Boys State programs; and 1,352 youth entered the Legion’s Shooting Sports individual postal round competition where the top 30 made it to the national tournament in Colorado Springs, Colo.

The American Legion’s youth programs build tomorrow’s leaders and help young adults better understand and honor the many sacrifices veterans made and active servicemembers continue to make. As the programs get underway, let’s show our support to the youth for their achievements by following the stories, videos and photos that capture their Legion program participation.

73rd session of American Legion Boys Nation, July 19-27. Follow along at www.legion.org/boysnation as 100 rising high school seniors arrive in Washington, D.C., to represent their respective states in one of the Legion’s premier youth programs. The delegates will be assigned to either the Federalist or Nationalist party upon their arrival at Marymount University in Arlington, Va. Over the course of the week, the young men will conduct party conventions and senate sessions, elect a president and vice president, introduce and vote on bills submitted by their peers, and hear from guest speakers. Activities off campus include a tour of the National Mall, meetings with elected officials from their respective states, and dinner at Greenbelt Post 136 in Maryland with special guest National Commander Brett Reistad.

29th annual Junior 3-Position Air Rifle National Championship, July 26-27, Colorado Springs, Colo. The top 15 precision and sporter youth air rifle competitors made it through two postal rounds of The American Legion’s Junior 3-Position Air Rifle tournament to earn a spot in the championships at the Olympic Training Center USA Shooting Range. The air rifle marksmen will shoot a .177 caliber air rifle in three positions: prone, standing and kneeling. The top eight shooters in both categories will be finalized July 26 and advance to the championship round July 27.

Photos and stories of the top 16 finalists and the winners will be available at www.legion.org/shooting.

American Legion World Series (ALWS), Aug. 15-20, Shelby, N.C. The ALWS will feature the top eight teams in the nation, all of which will have a chance to play on national television. Games 1-4 on Thursday, Aug. 15, and Games 5-6 on Friday, Aug. 16, will be live streamed online at www.espn3.com. Games televised live on ESPNU include Games 7-9 on Saturday, Aug. 17, Games 10-12 on Sunday, Aug. 18, the two semifinal games on Monday, Aug. 19, and Tuesday’s championship game. Fans unable to attend the World Series will have the ability to view game highlights and photos via www.legion.org/baseball and watch all 15 games live on www.espn3.com for free.

The positive influence the American Legion Family is having on our youth through these programs is astounding and everyone involved should be proud of their efforts.
Donations to American Legion Charities support several programs

American Legion Charities was launched as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit trust in 2010 to allow American Legion Family members and friends to contribute to the overall organization and its many services or choose a specific program to support. American Legion Charities provides direct support and assistance to veterans, military personnel, families and communities.

Donors have the ability to select the pillar that best suits them, or all of the pillars, depending on their wishes. The following illustrate several of the programs and services supported by American Legion Charities.

- **The American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation.** This foundation provides immediate support for military and veteran parents, with children at home, who are facing unforeseen financial hardships. The foundation also funds expert, free-of-charge assistance to veterans and families working to understand and receive government benefits they are due. The foundation’s parent is the 1925-established American Legion Endowment Fund, which has provided tens of millions of dollars in emergency help to qualified, struggling military and veteran families and has supported tens of thousands of American Legion service officers over the years.

- **The American Legion’s National Emergency Fund (NEF).** NEF directs immediate cash grants to American Legion Family members and Legion posts whose lives have been turned upside-down due to natural disasters. The fund, created in response to Hurricane Hugo in 1989, has provided more than $8 million in direct financial assistance – up to $3,000 for qualified American Legion Family members and up to $10,000 for posts.

- **Child Welfare Foundation (CWF).** Created by The American Legion in 1954, the Child Welfare Foundation awards grants to nonprofit organizations nationwide that contribute to the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs of children and youth. Since 1955, more than $13 million in CWF grants have been awarded.

- **Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW).** OCW was established in 2007 to provide relief for active-duty military personnel recovering from wounds and illnesses at VA health-care facilities and transition units, purchase and deliver items not normally provided by the federal government, such as art and sports therapy equipment, and provide recreational opportunities and entertainment for recovering warriors and their families.

- **The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund.** The Legacy Fund awards financial aid for youth whose parents have died on active duty since 9/11, or who have received VA disability rating of 50 percent or greater. Each needs-based scholarship provides up to $20,000 in aid for undergraduate or post-graduate college education. Since the Legacy Scholarship’s first grant in 2004, 366 military children of the fallen and disabled have received over $4.4 million in aid.

Donations to American Legion Charities are tax-deductible. To donate, please visit [www.legion.org/donate](http://www.legion.org/donate).

More than 100 wounded veterans in Marblehead, Ohio, spent three days last month fishing Lake Erie as part of the eighth annual Walleyes for Wounded Heroes event. The veterans from Kentucky, Illinois, West Virginia, Indiana and Ohio enjoyed angling with professional charter boat captains and interacting with fellow veterans injured in service.

“The greatest thing about the military was those bonds that were built. This is a fun event that you can connect with other veterans that have been through similar situations,” said U.S. Army Ranger Jesse Sage, who medically retired in 2015 due to multiple injuries, including two traumatic brain injuries.

Priority for participation in the event is given to Purple Heart recipients, while veterans rated 50-percent disabled or higher by the Department of Veterans Affairs, and those veterans with a DD-214 showing a debilitating injury occurring in training or other non-combat operations also are eligible to attend.

Veterans pay nothing to participate in the event, thanks in part to The American Legion providing Operation Comfort Warriors grants to Walleyes for Wounded Heroes since 2014. The grants have grown in size over the years; this year’s grant of $16,000 covered the cost of lodging for the veterans, as well as breakfast and lunch each day.

“Honestly, we wouldn’t be here without The American Legion,” said Charles Reed, director of the event co-sponsor Kentucky Wounded Heroes.

The veterans arrived June 19 at Little Ted’s Cottages and Family Resort and were treated to a dinner of more than 100 pounds of fried perch and walleye caught in Lake Erie. The opening ceremony included a color guard for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Wildlife, honoring a Gold Star family and the recognition of the POW-MIA table.
DID YOU KNOW?

- Episode 4 of “To Strengthen a Nation: The American Legion Story” examines the organization’s legacy of support for a strong defense and members of the U.S. armed forces. Watch at www.youtube.com/user/americanlegionHQ.

- The digitization of more than 50 years of American Legion national newsletters is available on the Legion’s Digital Archive, https://archive.legion.org. These newsletters cover a timeframe, 1950-2000, that complements previously digitized material. The newsletters from the early 1950s to 1990, primarily published under the title The American Legion Advance, focus on supporting post leadership with programming ideas and community outreach initiatives. And The American Legion Dispatch has been digitized back to its first issue in 1991.

Additionally, the Digital Archive offers several central publications that illuminate the history of The American Legion from 1919 to the mid-2010s. These include:
- The American Legion magazine in all its versions, 1919-2016;
- Forty years of historic American Legion press releases, 1925, 1945-1952, 1957-1991; and
- Proceedings of national meetings, 1919-present.

- On June 26, a bipartisan group of U.S. senators introduced a Senate resolution honoring The American Legion’s 100th anniversary of serving veterans, their families and communities. Sens. Mike Braun (R-Ind.), Jon Tester (D-Mont.), Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) and Todd Young (R-Ind.) introduced a resolution designating August 23-29 as “American Legion Week” to coincide with the Legion’s 100th anniversary convention in its home city of Indianapolis.

In a press release, Braun said, “The American Legion has been a cornerstone of American life from the local to the federal level since the beginning, and serves as a constant reminder of the enormous contributions America’s armed service members have made to enrich our nation during and after their military service.”

LEGISLATIVE

President signs Blue Water Navy Veterans Act into law

On June 25, President Trump signed into law H.R. 299, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019. The American Legion-supported legislation will extend disability benefits covering medical conditions associated with Agent Orange exposure to those who served on ships off the coast of Vietnam, known as “Blue Water” Navy veterans.

Veterans who served in Vietnam between 1962 and 1975 are presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange if diagnosed with a medical condition associated with the herbicide, according to the Agent Orange Act of 1991. Presumptive diseases of exposure to the herbicide include certain cancers, Parkinson’s disease and diabetes. However, this act applied only to veterans who served on land and in Vietnam’s inland waterways. H.R. 299 extends these benefits to any military personnel who served on any vessel during the Vietnam War that came within 12 nautical miles of the coastlines of Vietnam.

H.R. 299 further expands coverage and includes the provision that every veteran exposed to herbicides like Agent Orange should receive the same presumptive benefits. A provision in H.R. 299 states, “A veteran who, during active military, naval, or air service, served offshore of the Republic of Vietnam during the period beginning on Jan. 9, 1962, and ending on May 7, 1975,” will be eligible for disability compensation for presumptive conditions of herbicide exposure. This will allow veterans who fall into that category and whose claims have been denied or held in pending status to gain access to VA medical care for conditions on the presumptive list.

H.R. 299 will afford spouses of certain veterans whose death was caused by a service-connected disability access to pension benefits and provides the children of veterans of covered service in Thailand who suffer from spina bifida access to health care, vocational training and rehabilitation, and monetary allowance.
MEMBERSHIP

POST EXCELLENCE AWARD

To qualify for the Post Excellence Award banner, a post is required to achieve excellence in the four criteria’s below. The purposes of this award is membership growth, exposure of American Legion values to the youth of the community, and increased visibility of the American Legion Family through service projects.

The standard to be achieved in each area is as follows:

- **Membership.** Post membership must be at least one member more than the previous year. A post officer must attend district meetings.
- **Consolidated Post Report.** CPRs must be submitted by July 1. The American Legion’s federal charter requires the submission of an annual report to Congress on activities for the year. MyLegion.org has made it simple for a post to submit its CPR in a timely manner.
- **Sharing of post history.** The American Legion’s Centennial web page (www.centennial.legion.org) allows posts to convey its legacy by sharing historical photos, videos and print material. Starting a post profile will suffice.
- **Community activity.** The post must conduct an event that connects the local community with The American Legion post. The objective is to open your doors, welcome the community in, and educate them on what The American Legion is all about and how the post is an asset to the community. Posts do not need to have a physical building to accomplish this. This activity can be held in a park, a community center, or anywhere the post can welcome and interact with the local community.

The district commander responsible for the post will certify a post as having achieved the four specified criteria. The district commander will submit a list of posts meeting the criteria to department headquarters. That list should include the post name, phone number, address and commander’s name. If possible, accompany the last two criteria with copies of press releases submitted to the local media about the projects to show they were accomplished and the image of The American Legion was enhanced through local media. The copy submitted should include a date and time stamp showing receipt by the media outlet. The department adjutant will transmit information as posts qualify to: American Legion National Headquarters, Attn: Membership, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206-1055.

MEMBERSHIP

Team 100: Why I joined and renew

“I was born into the American Legion Family for my father was a seven-time commander and my uncle was a five-time commander of Post 488 in New Boston, Texas. As a child, many of my family’s social activities were at Post 488 where they had youth programs like boxing and baseball, family picnics, bingo and meetings, where children were welcomed and played together outside while the adults conducted business inside. Each year, my father and I would go to all the local cemeteries to put flags on graves. When a veteran passed away, I would attend the funeral with my father and other Legionnaires who were there to provide military honors. I would estimate that I visited the Legion post at least twice weekly. And since my father had nine brothers who survived World War II, all of whom were involved in the Legion, it was like a family gathering place in a very small, rural town.

In law school I was in ROTC and remember how proud my father was to pin my “butter bars” on my shoulders when I graduated. I did not realize then that it would be the last time I would see him. At his funeral I was in uniform as I watched the color guard provide military honors.

After being discharged I received an application to join The American Legion. For a few years I never visited the post but I read the newsletter. Houston had suffered a hurricane and the post newsletter had an article titled “Is This The Image We Want For Our Post.” I mailed a donation to help with rebuilding the sign in front of the post. Shortly thereafter I received a telephone call from a past department commander, who was a member of the post, requesting that I attend a meeting in order for them to thank me for the contribution. At that meeting, I was elected post adjutant; and there has hardly been a year since when I wasn’t holding one or more offices at the post, district and department level.

One day another lawyer asked why I devoted so much time to The American Legion. When I finished telling him my story he said that it appeared that I was trying to gain the affirmation of my father, who loved The American Legion. Perhaps that is true. Perhaps it is that combined with my memories of The American Legion. Perhaps it is because I believe strongly in the reasons that The American Legion existed and hope that it will someday return to that organization. It is probably a combination of those and many other reasons, including the many friends I have made, the difference which has been made in the lives of so many veterans and their families, and how, at its foundation, The American Legion contributes so much to children and youth, the community, state and nation.”

– Bryan D. Coleman, Post 560, Houston

Provide your reason for joining and renewing to dispatch@legion.org.
MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

Quick, direct and cost-effective access to Legionnaires

For years, the Kansas Sunflower Legionnaire was mailed quarterly to the department’s nearly 24,000 members at a cost of $30,000 a year. After going digital last summer by emailing its newsletter to members through the marketing company Delivra, The American Legion Department of Kansas now spends $840 a year to educate its members on department, post, district and national news. That’s $70 a month.

“Our membership really enjoys it,” said immediate Past Department Commander Dan Wiley.

American Legion National Headquarters uses Delivra to send out its e-newsletters. And once the company shared with Media & Communication Commission members, which Wiley is a member of, that they would work with departments as part of their relationship with National Headquarters, Wiley was on board after hearing feedback from post-level members.

During his travels around the state as vice commander, he would hear from Legionnaires that they never received the adjutant’s newsletter until after their monthly meeting, which usually fell within the first or second week of the month, so department news wouldn’t be relayed to post members or the newsletter wouldn’t be displayed at the post. “It was information from the department that members weren’t getting,” Wiley said.

Wiley made it his goal to start sending the Sunflower Legionnaire as an e-newsletter upon his election as department commander.

The first issue was emailed out in June 2018.

“Now, our department adjutant has a direct line to 12,000 of our members,” he said.

The Sunflower is sent to all emails that National Headquarters has on file and Delivra has access to, which is around 12,000 Kansas Legionnaires. The department sends the formatted newsletter to Delivra, and in turn they send it out with a dedicated department e-mail account. Kansas has its newsletter designed so every story, announcement or flyer has its own page that can be printed individually and hung at a Legion post.

As part of the $70 monthly fee, the department can send out two e-newsletter blasts. They use the second email blast to highlight an upcoming event, such as Boys State or Youth Cadet Law, and they used it to announce a membership contest.

“I just found (Delivra) to be really cost-effective and really the feedback I got from a lot of members was they never thought they’ve been more informed than they were this last year with the information they were getting,” Wiley said. “When we were doing a quarterly publication we were dating ourselves with the information. When you’re doing a monthly e-newsletter the information you get out is a lot more time-sensitive, timely. Anytime we can communicate with our members quickly is a positive thing.”

For more information, visit www.delivra.com.

MEMBERSHIP

Community engagement results in membership boost

American Legion Veterans Memorial Post 347 in Lady Lake, Fla., is the largest post in the organization with more than 6,650 members. The post had the biggest growth in membership with over 286 new members, not including transfers from the headquarters post, to achieve 103 percent in membership for the 2018-2019 year. It’s Post 347’s 31st consecutive year of having an all-time high in membership.

The post, which is near The Villages where 19,000 veterans live, grows its membership by keeping active in the community. To name a few of its efforts, Post 347 sends 10 young men to Florida Boys State; sponsors Boy Scout Troop and Cub Pack 244; hosts Village Honor Flight sendoffs and returns; supports JROTC programs, summer reading at the library for youth and other local youth programs such as baseball and soccer; provides financial support for a school lunch program at an elementary school for children in need; and delivers food baskets to less fortunate families for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Post 347 also pays for the rehabilitation of any veteran that enters the addiction program at the House of Hope in Wildwood; pays the dues for World War II veterans, members with 50 or more continuous years, active-duty servicemembers, and 20 members at a nearby correctional facility. The post sponsors activities for Veterans Day, Memorial Day, Flag Day, Fourth of July and serves a Thanksgiving dinner. The post’s parking lot and hall is used for emergency relief efforts, and in the last year alone Post 347 has donated more than $120,000 to memberships, American Legion programs and charities, and other and local events and programs.

The American Legion Dispatch wants to hear from posts on the ways they increased membership for 2018-2019. To share, email Dispatch at dispatch@legion.org.
THE AMERICAN LEGION’S IMPACT

3,415
Number of American Legion Baseball teams registered by June 1 for the 2019 season.

1,210
Number of VA hearing presentations prepared in May by Legion national claims specialists.

For the full report visit: www.legion.org/membership/impact

INDIANAPOLIS

Family fun during national convention

Sporting-event opportunities for the American Legion Family during the annual national convention have become something of a tradition. The 101st convention, in Indianapolis this August, will be no different. And with the layout of downtown Indy, getting to any or all of them from hotels is easy.

American Legion Family Night at Victory Field is Saturday, Aug. 24. The first pitch by National Commander Brett Reistad will be thrown at 7:05 p.m. The Pittsburgh Pirates AAA-affiliate Indianapolis Indians take on the Louisville Bats Cincinnati Reds AAA affiliate. Tickets range from $7 to $13.

To place an order online visit https://groupmatics.events/event/AmericanLegion7. The ticket deadline is Aug. 24.

WNBA Fever Basketball American Legion Family Night is Tuesday, Aug. 27, at Bankers Life Fieldhouse. Doors open at 6 p.m. and tipoff is at 7 p.m. The Indiana Fever take on the Las Vegas Aces. The American Legion Family, and the Legion’s centennial, will be acknowledged at halftime. Tickets – with and without food vouchers – range from $22 to $53.90.

To place an order online visit https://pacers.formstack.com/forms/americanlegionfamilynight. The ticket deadline is Aug. 5.

For information on bulk orders and more, go to www.legion.org/convention/resources.

PLANNER

August
8-10 National Membership Workshop, Indianapolis
15-20 American Legion World Series, Shelby, N.C.
18-22 Legacy Run
23-29 National Convention, Indianapolis