



### Protecting the American Flag

The American Legion strongly believes the flag is a symbol of our nation's freedom and all that we hold in common as Americans, secured by the servicemen and women who sacrificed so much for all citizens. That is why The American Legion continues to urge Congress to propose and approve an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would allow Congress to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States, our nation's enduring symbol of unity and freedom. Our belief is not to silence those who protest perceived injustices. Americans have the right to voice their views in respectful ways. We are not alone in this belief. The U.S. House of Representatives has routinely passed such an amendment. Every state has endorsed such a resolution. And surveys show that a majority of Americans agree that the flag should be protected. Rather than fearing such a constitutional amendment, members of Congress concerned about supporting the amendment should embrace it. The proposed flag protection amendment does not infringe on the Bill of Rights. Instead, it is a wonderful exercise in the popular sovereignty the Bill of Rights was designed to protect. Please support and cosponsor H.J. Res. 61 sponsored by Rep. Steve Womack, R-Ark., or S.J. Res. 46, sponsored by Sen. Steve Daines, R-Mont. (*Resolution 360*)

*The American Legion is the voice of 2 million American veterans and servicemembers. As a resolution-based organization, The American Legion's positions represent the views of its members and are based on our four pillars: Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children & Youth*

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THE AMERICAN LEGION

# LEGISLATIVE AGENDA for the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress

2<sup>nd</sup> Session



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# THE AMERICAN LEGION LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FOR THE 115<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS

## Support VA's suicide prevention efforts

As our nation deals with the effects of nearly two decades of war, the need for mental health services for our veterans will no doubt increase in the years to come. It is imperative to combat VA's staffing shortage by increasing recruitment and retention budgets, while also expanding direct hiring authority to medical center directors to expedite the hiring process of mental health professionals. All health care possibilities should be explored and considered to find the appropriate treatments, therapies and cures for veterans suffering from visible and/or invisible wounds. The American Legion strongly advocates for complementary and alternative therapy and urges Congress to provide VA the necessary funding to increase its Integrative Health and Wellness Program. *(Resolutions 28 and 165)*

## Limit outsourcing, unify VA's programs

Continued focus is needed to ensure VA can meet challenges in delivering high-quality, timely benefits and health care to veterans. In 2018, critical policy choices must be made, primarily the future of the Veterans Choice Program, which expires in August. A community care option is now a basic expectation for enrollees in VA's health-care system. Excessive outsourcing would render VHA too small to function economically or preserve quality of care and essentially dismantle it. Congress should pass legislation to unify VA's multiple non-VA care programs with VA as the coordinator and guarantor of care. *(Resolution 372)*

## Fully fund a superior national defense as the global war on terror continues

It is critical to maintain a well-funded national security strategy to ensure a strong national defense. The United States must enhance foreign policy, improve military intelligence, and increase cyber operations and capabilities. The American Legion advocates for a good quality of life for our troops and an improved transition process from military service to civilian life. The Legion vows to fight against those who desire to reduce the benefits of veterans, servicemembers, and their families to obtain short-term budget gains. *(Resolutions 17 and 86)*

## Create lifetime electronic health record

The American Legion supports VA in finally implementing a quality lifetime electronic health record (EHR) system that works in concert with the Department of Defense system to ensure that veterans' medical documents transfer seamlessly from active service to VA and community providers. *(Resolution 83)*

## Reclassify cannabis for medical research

The American Legion supports increased research into cannabis as part of the larger effort to develop complementary and alternative treatments and therapies. Cannabis is classified as schedule I drug and drugs such as cocaine, methamphetamine and methadone are classified as schedule II drugs. The American Legion urges Congress to amend legislation to remove Cannabis from schedule I and reclassify it in a category that, at a minimum, will recognize cannabis as a drug with potential medical value, and further urge the Drug Enforcement Agency to license privately-funded medical cannabis production operations in the United States to enable safe and efficient cannabis drug development research. *(Resolutions 11,160,165)*

## Institute gender-specific health care for women veterans

Women veterans face remarkably different experiences than their male counterparts when transitioning in and out of combat roles, in between services or back to civilian life. VA must ensure an improved quality of life for women veterans with gender-specific health care to meet their needs. *(Resolution 147)*

## Support those who care for wounded veterans

There are 5.5 million caregivers who go unnoticed while they care for America's wounded. Military caregivers suffer higher rates of depression and health problems than others. The American Legion is committed to supporting these hidden heroes. *(Resolution 146)*

## Defend veterans education benefits

As the primary author of the original GI Bill, The American Legion continues to focus on the sustainability of this important earned benefit, while ensuring that veterans receive the most benefit possible from it. *(Resolution 349)*

## Repeal unfair offsets that penalize disabled veterans and widows

Many military retirees must forfeit some of their retirement pay to receive their VA service-connected disability compensation. It is equally outrageous VA survivor benefits (DIC) are offset from military Survivor Benefit Plan annuities. The American Legion supports legislation to repeal both of these unjust offsets. *(Resolutions 85 and 224)*

## Provide mandatory end-of-service exams for reservists

Active-duty servicemembers have the right to physical examinations when separating. After all, servicemembers retiring from active duty are required to have such examinations. This same right to an end-of-service exam is only partially authorized for reserve component servicemembers. This unfair treatment must be changed. *(Resolution 85)*

## Ensure those returning from active duty retain re-employment rights

The Uniformed Services Employment and Re-employment Rights Act protects the rights of servicemembers to be re-employed after returning from active duty, including reserve or National Guard members. The American Legion wants to prohibit employers from pressuring a veteran into waiving his or her veteran's employment rights and protections. *(Resolution 315)*

## Continue funding programs to end veterans homelessness

To fully implement VA's pledge to eradicate veterans homelessness, Congress must continue making responsible investments in affordable housing and programs such as Supportive Services for Veteran Families that move veterans and their families off the street and into stable housing. *(Resolution 340)*