Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

As our nation’s elected leaders remain deadlocked about a solution to the federal deficit crisis, The American Legion is in Washington this week to send a clear message: no more cuts to the Department of Defense. Hundreds of Legionnaires are now at the capital city to meet with their congressional delegations to share deep concerns about our national security, especially at a time of war, if more cuts are imposed on the military starting March 1.

The 53rd American Legion Washington Conference is under way, and while protection of national defense is a top priority, many other legislative priorities are on the agenda, including:

- The growing VA backlog, with 69 percent of benefits claims exceeding the 125-day decision window, as our troops come home from war, and the beleaguered processing system awaits a 21st century solution that puts quality on par with quantity
- The Legion’s opposition to increased fees and pharmaceutical copayments for military retirees using TRICARE
- Improved opportunities for veterans to find good jobs, start businesses and convert their military experiences into credits for licenses and credentials in a number of private-sector and public career fields
- Better screening, diagnosis and treatment for veterans in need of VA mental health care

Click here to see a complete report of the Legion’s priorities and the resolutions supporting them, heading into the 2013 Washington Conference. 

See the whole Washington Conference schedule here: 
http://www.legion.org/washingtonconference/schedule

Also, I want to remind everyone that on Tuesday, Feb. 26,
we have a number of top speakers lined up for the Commander's Call. That session will be streamed live online, starting at 8:30 a.m., Eastern time, after which Legionnaires will meet with their congressional delegations on Capitol Hill. Click here to view the Commander's Call live online Tuesday:
http://client.stretchinternet.com/client/legion.portal?mode=link#

You can also follow our work this week on behalf of America's veterans, their families and communities on www.legion.org on Facebook.
http://www.facebook.com/americanlegionhq and on Twitter @AmericanLegion

Thank you all for your service and patriotism.

For God and Country,

James E. Koutz
National Commander
Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

During my trip to South Carolina last month, I had the pleasure of meeting some of our wounded warriors. Spc. Ashley Durham, a young man who survived a suicide bomber’s attack that killed three of his comrades last year, embodies the spirit of the American soldier.

Spc. Durham is a respectful young man, working hard to rehab his injuries. In fact, Ashley told me, that he is “recovering ridiculously fast.” Like so many of our injured warriors, he wouldn’t dream of asking for assistance. But when a group like The American Legion presents a donation, the expressions of gratitude are real and heartfelt. Often, the gifts are received with a happy “thank you” or a tear of joy.

I recall such responses during the Operation Comfort Warriors stop at Fort Jackson, where we presented the Warrior Transition Unit with $6,500 worth of sports equipment. That’s part of the nearly $60,000 worth of goods that the Legion’s OCW program has provided to 10 different WTUs in the first three months of this year.

At Fort Jackson, donations were used to purchase baseball, basketball, golf and archery equipment for the adaptive sports therapy program. Earlier this year, donors helped provide Segways so that those with leg and other injuries at Fort Knox could more easily make their way to appointments and elsewhere on the base. And, at Fort Gordon’s Warrior Transition Battalion, musical instruments such as an electric drum set, guitars and a piano were donated to aid in the healing process.

In the coming months, Legionnaires and National Headquarters staff will deliver more comfort items to our wounded servicemembers at Fort Carson, Fort Drum and Fort Riley, among others.

But we can do more to help our brave men and women
who are recovering in WTUs and military hospitals around the nation. If you have already donated, I thank you and ask that you consider another donation. If you have not already donated, I ask you to consider making a contribution. Every dollar helps.

All your generous gifts do add up in so many ways. As Ashley told me, “We do appreciate everything we receive. There are no words to say how thankful we are.”

Thank you for what you do every day – for veterans, their families and our current servicemembers.

For God and Country,

James E. Koutz
National Commander
Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

Once again, Legionnaires have shown their unwavering sense of mutual helpfulness toward each other and their community.

Last month the Illinois River reached its highest level ever and flooded the town of Marseilles. Post 235 members, along with American Legion Family members and other volunteers helped assemble around 1,000 sack lunches every day and then delivered them throughout the community.

I am grateful for all of their hard work and perseverance during a time of crises in their community. I know it made a difference to the victims who were forced out of their homes and the emergency crews who were helping to turn things back to normal.

Sadly, tragedies like this can occur anywhere and anytime in our beloved United States of America. At this time of the year, for example, communities in the Midwest are on alert for damaging spring storms such as tornadoes. And soon, residents along the eastern seaboard and the Gulf Coast will be monitoring news for potential hurricane activity.

When disaster strikes a Legion post or a current member’s primary residence, there is help available from The American Legion’s National Emergency Fund.

Thanks to NEF, more than $425,000 was distributed to 450 individuals and posts affected by Superstorm Sandy. Those funds come from generous donations to NEF throughout the year. To assist those in need with a tax-deductible contribution, please visit this webpage or mail to The American Legion, National Emergency Fund, P.O. Box 6141, Indianapolis, IN 46206

James E. ‘Jim’ Koutz
National Commander
The American Legion
Thank you for what you do every day – for veterans, their families and the communities in which they live.

For God and Country,

James E. Koutz
National Commander
Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

The American Legion turns 94 today, March 15. It was on this date in 1919 when the first American Legion caucus was convened in Paris, coordinated by members of the American Expeditionary Force. Weary from war and its effects, they were concerned about their lives after discharge, the welfare of their comrades and the general condition of our nation. Such concerns gave rise to a value system, and The American Legion swiftly became the nation’s largest veterans service organization.

Today, with 2.4 million members, the Legion is as strong and relevant as ever.

The American Legion birthday is a time to celebrate. Cake and candles are OK, but this Legion birthday, I am asking for something more. I am asking you to share your American Legion story. Share it by speaking in your community and engaging local media. Share it by posting news of your services on Facebook, Twitter and the Legiontown U.S.A. web platform.

Here are just some of the ways you can join me in this year’s birthday celebration:

- Upload stories and photos about post activities including birthday party celebrations, on the Legiowntown U.S.A. site.
- Customize a draft speech available on the Legion website and deliver it in a public setting. The birthday speech can be downloaded free as a PDF or Word document by visiting www.legion.org/publications and scrolling down to the Public Relations section.
- Tune in to The American Legion Amateur Radio Club (TALARC), which will operate N9L – November Niner Legion – as a special-event station to commemorate the Legion’s 94th birthday Friday and Saturday. In addition to operating SSB on 14.270 MHz +/- 5 KHz, central Indiana stations may contact N9L on 146.46 MHz Simplex, or worldwide via IRLP Node 4816, on Friday, March 15, between 10 a.m. EDT (1400 UTC) and 4 p.m. EDT (2000 UTC) for birthday special event QSOs.

James E. 'Jim' Koutz
National Commander
The American Legion
UTC) and 4 p.m. EDT (2000 UTC), and Saturday, March 16, between 9 a.m. EDT (1300 UTC) and 4 p.m. EDT (2000 UTC). N9L will also be available via IRLP Node 4816. A full-color N9L certificate confirming contacts will be sent on receipt of a 9-by-12 inch self-addressed stamped envelope to TALARC, The American Legion National Headquarters, 700 N. Pennsylvania Street, Indianapolis, IN 46204.

Thank you for all you do every day – for veterans, their families and the communities in which they live.

Happy birthday, American Legion!

For God and Country,

James E. Koutz
National Commander
Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

All of us cherish the memories of our fallen comrades, friends or loved ones.

Not a day goes by when I don’t think about the friends I’ve lost. I think about the young 20-somethings I knew from Vietnam who made the supreme sacrifice serving our nation. I think about the heroes from other eras – the Great Wars, Korea, Desert Storm, Iraq and Afghanistan – who gave their lives so all of us could enjoy our freedoms.

This weekend, of course, another Memorial Day is upon us. I hope that you will join me in remembering to honor not only veterans who were close to you but also all of our veterans who gave their all. While the mass media often makes this weekend out to be about barbecues and department store sales, it is up to each one of us to remind our communities about the true meaning of this day.

I also encourage you to take a moment and visit The American Legion’s new web page dedicated to honor and remembrance, [www.legion.org/honor](http://www.legion.org/honor). Scores of wonderful tributes to the men and women who served our nation with honor, courage and dignity can be found there.

Some of these tributes were contributed by the veterans themselves, or their family members. It’s easy – and free – to add your story, or your family’s legacy, to this growing collection of American military history. Just visit [www.legiontown.org](http://www.legiontown.org) to submit a story, or read more about how to participate [here](http://www.legiontown.org) or [here](http://www.legiontown.org).

Thank you for what you do every day – for veterans, their families and the communities in which they live. May our fallen never be forgotten.

For God and Country,

James E. ‘Jim’ Koutz
National Commander
The American Legion
Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

I always feel emboldened when I see Old Glory flying proud. Whether it’s a larger-than-life flag being unfurled during a stadium sporting event or a small one being waved by a child at a parade, I feel a deep sense of patriotism.

Of course, this Friday is June 14, Flag Day. While I believe that American flags should be flown, honored and respected every day or the year, June 14 is a special day. It’s a day when Legionnaires like us can bring attention to the red, white and blue that unites all Americans.

For example, you can recommend that your members of Congress join the American Legion-supported legislation to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States. Our support of this crucial amendment is unwavering, as indicated by the resolution’s passage during the most recent national convention.

If your community is having a Flag Day event, there is a handy set of suggested remarks for anyone given the opportunity to speak.

Flag Day also is a time when patriotic Americans pay tribute by displaying a flag outside their home. Unfortunately, not everyone is well versed in flag etiquette. If you see a flag treated incorrectly, be sure to help resolve the situation amicably. And refer to this wonderful Q&A on the flag code.

Thank you for what you do every day – for veterans, their families and the communities in which they live.

For God and Country,

James E. ‘Jim’ Koutz
National Commander
The American Legion
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Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

What if The American Legion simply ceased to exist?

What if there were no Legionnaires to volunteer time, donate goods or raise funds in their local communities? What if there were no Legionnaires fighting for the rights of all veterans on Capitol Hill and in state legislatures? Imagine a world where Legionnaires are not there to honor the fallen at military and veteran funerals, or to lead patriotic services during local Memorial Day, Veterans Day or Flag Day ceremonies, or to mentor young people looking for adult leadership.

Such a scenario would be disastrous for nearly 14,000 communities where local posts make major differences every day.

That's why I am reaching out to you to encourage your participation in the Legion's push to reach an all-time high in membership by our 100th anniversary in 2019. A new five-year strategic plan, outlined during the Spring Meetings, is thoughtful and comprehensive. My thanks go out to the National Membership & Post Activities Committee members on their fine work so far.

In the coming weeks and months, department commanders will outline specifics about how they will begin to implement their plans in five key areas: Brand Awareness; Communication; Training. Education and Leadership Development; Post Creation. Development and Revitalization; and Membership Recruiting and Retention.

I'm sure that you have some good ideas on how to achieve this goal. Please contact your department commander with your suggestions.

As M&PA Committee Chairman Denise Rohan said, "We want to encourage all members, all members all the way to the post level, to be a part of this plan. It needs to be a grass-roots effort. We have to tell The American Legion story to our nation's military and emphasize to them that they are veterans, even though they are still wearing the uniform. They are eligible to be members of..."
The American Legion.

This is our road map for a bright future and an American Legion that will continue to be the nation’s staunchest advocate for veterans, servicemen and women, their families, America’s children, and our communities.

Thank you for your participation in this effort, and for what you do every day.

For God and Country,

James E. Koutz
National Commander

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Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

I am looking forward to next month’s National Convention as a way to reconnect with friends, celebrate our successes from the past year and look ahead to an exciting future for The American Legion.

For those who will join me at the convention, I would encourage you to either participate in or recommend to others some of the free workshops for veterans. Among them:

- The National Economic Commission is putting on a series of events geared toward helping veterans, servicemembers and their spouses find civilian employment. Major companies like GE, SAP, Wal-Mart and others are participating. In addition to a Hiring Our Heroes job fair, there are resume workshops, a two-day summit for women veterans on becoming an entrepreneur, discussions about training programs and much more.
  
  **Here is where you can view the full schedule and register for events.**

- The Magazine Commission is hosting its second annual American Legion Digital Media Workshop for post, district and department webmasters, editors and public-relations specialists. The free workshop is broken down into three groups: beginner, intermediate and advanced. Participants can attend any or all of the breakout sessions which include membership promotion using the web and social media. The last session is a question and answer session open to everyone.

  **You can find a schedule and register here.**

James E. ‘Jim’ Koutz
National Commander
The American Legion
I am sure that you or others in your post or department will find these valuable. Be sure to spread the word to those who may not be aware of these great opportunities.

Thank you for what you do every day on behalf of veterans, servicemen and women and their families.

For God and Country,

James E. Koutz
National Commander

Click here to forward this mailing with your personal message.
Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

For many of us, summer means backyard cookouts, baseball games, road trips, and time spent with family and friends, often in the great outdoors.

To those of us in The American Legion, summer also means youth programs. In July and August, those programs hit full stride with Boys Nation, American Legion Baseball, Junior Shooting Sports and the Boy Scout Jamboree. Children & Youth and Americanism represent two of the four pillars on which our organization was founded. At this point in the summer, I am truly delighted to see all the volunteer efforts that go into making these pillars come to life.

- I was honored to attend this year’s jamboree. It’s a wonderful event for the Boy Scouts of America, the first-ever youth program endorsed by The American Legion, that places a high priority on leadership, skills training and community service.
- Nearly 100 young men participated in this year’s Boys Nation. Thanks to volunteers and staff, the students had a successful and meaningful experience, including meeting senators from their home states as well as touring historic monuments and the East Wing of the White House.

In the next two weeks, athletes take center stage in Colorado Springs, Colo., and Shelby, N.C. The Junior Shooting Sports competition begins Friday, while the nation’s top amateur baseball teams compete for the...
eight spots in The American Legion World Series.

None of these rites of summer would exist if not for the hard-working, dedicated volunteers who mentor young people every day, raising funds for these programs, providing support and filling in wherever needed in communities across our great nation.

On behalf of the thousands of young Americans who have benefitted from your commitment to these and other youth programs, you have my gratitude.

Thank you for what you do every day on behalf of veterans, servicemen and women, and our nation's youth. Thank you for making sure that every day is Veterans Day.

For God and Country,

James E. Koutz
National Commander
Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

As my year as your national commander winds down to a close, I can’t help but think about some of the great people I met during my travels.

Thanks to the kindness of American Legion Family members everywhere, I accompanied Legionnaires on Operation Comfort Warriors deliveries at Fort Jackson, Fort Gordon and just this week at Fort Hood. During these events, I was honored to meet many brave servicemen and women who are recovering from their injuries. I will long remember their stories and their gratitude toward The American Legion.

I was inspired to meet Legionnaire Isaac “Feet” Jensen, an Iraq War veteran who lost both his legs in combat. Jensen, a Utah resident, was taken in by Legionnaires who helped him assimilate into their lives, their post and their Riders group. Be sure to learn about Jensen’s journey and motorcycle riding in the September issue of The American Legion Magazine. For a sneak preview, check out this video.

Along with Auxiliary National President Peggy Thomas, I was honored to attend ceremonies commemorating our heroes who were laid to rest in the American cemeteries in Normandy and Brittany, France. Behind the scenes of the solemn pageantry are dedicated individuals – Americans and French citizens – who work tirelessly throughout the year to preserve the memories of our fallen heroes.

Last but not least, I enjoyed meeting thousands of Legionnaires, Auxiliary members and Sons. I will long remember my visits to posts large and small, and the comradeship we shared. There are many more memories, too many to share here. But taken all
together, they represent a year in which every day was indeed Veterans Day.

Thank you for what you do every day on behalf of veterans, servicemen and women, and the communities in which they live.

For God and Country,

James E. Koutz
National Commander

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