

THE AMERICAN LEGION

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Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

If the first Walk for Veterans is any indication, these awareness events will bring attention and gratitude to The American Legion.

Last weekend, dozens of American Legion Family members, veterans and others walked 2.5 miles from Legion Post 2 in Manchester, N.H., to a nearby Veterans Memorial Park. Along the way, **civilians offered up their thanks and motorists honked their horns in appreciation.**

Quite often, our organization goes about its duty of helping veterans very quietly. We assist Vietnam-era veterans with health benefits. We organize job fairs where transitioning servicemembers meet with hiring managers. We provide resources to veteran families struggling with finances or recovering from natural disasters. (During these walks, **donations will go toward The National Emergency Fund**, which provides grants to Legion Family members and posts in the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster.)



I was honored to attend the first walk in New Hampshire and look forward to participating in others. However, these walks do not have to coincide with my visit to your department or area. Instead, it would be great to incorporate a walk into a regularly scheduled activity or to bring attention to another event. Perhaps, a donation to a local VA hospital via Operation Comfort Warriors could include a Walk for Veterans. Or an awareness walk could be part of a post's Veterans Day program.

The timing of these walks is a secondary consideration. Their primary purpose is to remind our friends and neighbors that The American Legion is still serving our communities.

In fact, during the New Hampshire walk, I was reminded of how veterans continue to care for their comrades without fanfare. Iraq War veteran Michael Murphy told me about his friend, Marine Lance Cpl. Adam Brooks. Murphy regularly tends to a tree dedicated to Brooks at the memorial park.

"Adam died in 2004. We were best friends," Murphy said. "I live everyday to keep his memory alive. It's not about what I did in the desert. It's about what I do here."

Mr. Murphy is correct. It's what we – The American Legion Family – do here on behalf of our nation's past, present and future veterans. And sometimes we need to come together to remind ourselves and our communities about the powerful bond and

commitment we share.

Duty. Honor. Country.



Dale Barnett
National Commander

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National Commander Update

Honoring heroes from the War on Terrorism

Dale Barnett sworn in as national commander

Video: [Meet Dale Barnett](#)



September 10, 2015 • Issue No. 368

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Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

It's hard to miss the political rhetoric these days. Thanks to 24-hour news, social media and the headline-grabbing half-truths, the 2016 presidential campaign is already in full swing.

Many of us would prefer that the candidates stick to the issues. We would like real answers on real issues. How would candidates address concerns with VA care? How would candidates prioritize national security issues such as ISIS, our southern border and North Korea?

Even if we sometimes feel disenchanting with our political system, it's still the best one in the world. We, the people, get to cast our votes and decide who will represent us from town council to city mayor to state governor to federal lawmakers and, of course, the president.



Today — Sept. 22 — is **National Voter Registration Day**. It's a special day when communities and organizations host forums to sign up unregistered voters.

There are many opportunities throughout the year when Legionnaires register voters in their communities. One example: at a naturalization ceremony last month in LaPlace, La., Legion Family members signed up new citizens to vote. But your post doesn't have to hold such a ceremony to sign up new voters.

The Legion's "Get Out the Vote" program encourages all American Legion posts, districts and departments to be actively engaged in the electoral process by serving as poll volunteers, poll workers and by encouraging and assisting others to register and vote.

In just a few short months, the first ballots for the 2016 presidential nominations will be counted at primaries and caucuses. I would encourage posts and districts to consider how best they can promote the Legion's Get Out the Vote program (download the PDF: <http://www.legion.org/sites/legion.org/files/legion/publications/Get-Out-The-Vote-Brochure.pdf>) and assist nonregistered voters in your community to participate in our election process.

We have all fought for the right for free elections. Let's take that another step by educating our fellow citizens on the process.

Duty. Honor. Country.

Dale Barnett
National Commander

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National Commander Update

Commander Barnett leads first Walk for Veterans

Walk for Veterans upcoming Events

Video: New Hampshire Walk for Veterans



 **PAID UP FOR LIFE**
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September 22, 2015 • Issue No. 369

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Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

Buzz cuts have united servicemembers for generations. They are remembered among the first rites of passage for young servicemembers as they leave the civilian world behind for service to their nation. Now, veterans and others can accept the Buzz Cut Challenge to share in this act of military service while supporting veterans, today's servicemembers and their families.

The American Legion will hold community-based Buzz Cut Challenge events in more than a dozen cities across the country from Nov. 2-10. For a suggested donation of \$10 at these events, Great Clips stylists will be on hand to provide buzz cuts to attendees willing to say goodbye to their hair for a great cause.



[Click here for event locations](#)

Even if you don't live near a community with a Buzz Cut Challenge event, you can still participate. In fact, you don't even have to get a buzz cut.

Here are some ways you can help:

- **Donate online**
- Challenge family, friends, police officers, firefighters, local sports teams, teachers and others to join you using [#BuzzCutChallenge](#) on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram

As you reflect back to your buzz cut initiation, you may also recall the camaraderie, teamwork and lifelong friendships that followed you through your time in service through today. This Buzz Cut Challenge serves as another opportunity to honor and provide assistance for our veteran comrades, today's servicemembers, and the families that support them in good times and bad, with and without hair.

Duty. Honor. Country.

Dale Barnett
National Commander

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National Commander Update

Commander hits on three key topics at Fall Meetings

Walk for Veterans in Hartford, Conn.

Walk for Veterans event raises \$30,913 for OCW



October 19, 2015 • Issue No. 370

From: The American Legion
Sent: Friday, November 06, 2015 6:38:59 AM
To: Library Division
Cc:
Subject: Take Down Hep C

[View as a Web page](#)

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Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

As we age, doctor visits and routine physicals become more frequent. As health-conscious and careful as we are, sometimes additional testing is necessary. When I recently learned about hepatitis C (hep C) and its prevalence among U.S. veterans, I thought surely I had been tested. However, I was wrong. The facts related to hep C and veterans are staggering:

- Over 5 percent of veterans enrolled in the care of the Veterans Health Administration have hep C, a blood-borne virus, which causes inflammation of the liver that can lead to cirrhosis and liver cancer.
- Up to 75 percent of people with chronic hep C in the United States do not know they have it.
- Approximately 80 percent experience no symptoms following infection.



The risks and serious health consequences for veterans must not be ignored. We need to think tactically, just like we did when we served, about how we can work together to **Take Down Hep C**. The disease is curable – which means the hep C virus is not detectable in the blood months after treatment ends – but the first step is to get the test. I am planning to take the antibody test and I am asking you to do the same.

This week, The American Legion is joining the fight to **Take Down Hep C**. This campaign is being made possible with the support of AbbVie, Inc., a national corporate alliance of The American Legion. The Legion is urging all veterans to learn about their risk factors and get tested. You can't do anything about hep C unless you know you have it. Visit www.Legion.org/TakeDownHepC to learn more about the disease.

We are also taking our concerns to Capitol Hill. The American Legion National Executive Committee last year approved Resolutions 140 and 148. The resolutions urge the Department of Veterans Affairs to approve presumptive service connection for hepatitis C and increase funding for medical research on this and other important veterans related health issues.

I encourage my fellow veterans to help **Take Down Hep C** by raising awareness about the disease, knowing the risk factors and getting tested for hep C antibodies.

Duty. Honor. Country



Dale Barnett
National Commander



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700 North Pennsylvania Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204

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Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

The American Legion has been the nation's foremost authority on the U.S. flag since the Americanism Commission convened the first National Flag Conference in 1923. That's when the U.S. Flag Code was crafted and adopted by dozens of organizations in attendance, from schoolteachers to U.S. Navy sailors.

Thanks to the efforts of The American Legion and other leaders in flag respect, pieces of the Stars and Stripes are no longer cut out and given to friends or family as mementoes. Likewise, it was the flag conference that made unacceptable the practice of putting one's signature on a U.S. flag.

Now, in a special centennial bookazine, The American Legion Family is sharing the story of Old Glory and the organization's role in its respect, love and reverence. "Indivisible: The Story of Our Flag" – is a beautifully illustrated, 112-page collector's edition all about our nation's colors. The bookazine is durable like a book, but the design is similar to a magazine – color photographs and illustrations appear throughout it. The bookazine contains interesting historical tidbits, voices, fun facts and more information about the flag from the Revolutionary War to the 21st century.

The \$9.95 bookazine will be available this week at retailers such as Barnes & Noble, Sam's Club, Books-A-Million, Hastings and Book World locations, as well as selected post exchanges and commissaries at U.S. military installations. Copies are also available for order online through American Legion Emblem Sales at www.legion.org/flag with a discounted price of \$7.95 for purchases of 25 or more. Orders can also be placed by calling toll-free: (888) 453-4466.

American Legion posts, in conjunction with the Auxiliary units, Sons squadrons and/or Riders chapters, may want to consider using these collector's editions as part of a fundraiser.

It's no coincidence that the bookazine's release is being timed with Veterans Day. Veterans are all united by our love of country and the flag. As a veteran and former history teacher, I am proud of the work that went into this fine publication.



This bookazine serves as a wonderful opportunity to share our love for country and passion for American history with family members, friends and others.



Duty. Honor. Country.



Dale Barnett
National Commander

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Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

As families gather to give thanks this week, it's an appropriate time to give thanks to you. Thank you for all that you do for The American Legion. Thank you for all that you do for veterans. Thank you for all that you do for children and youth.

But don't take just my word for it. The appreciation is sincere and heartfelt from those who benefit from our many wonderful, inspirational and impactful programs. Here is just a small sampling of how your membership, leadership and volunteer efforts help others every day of the year in every community in our great nation.

"I couldn't believe it. **There's no one that came through as fast as the Legion did.** It makes you want to pay your dues. I think it's great." – **Keith Miller**, who received an NEF grant after his home in Yarnell, Ariz., was swallowed by an out-of-control wildfire.

"Coming (to Boys Nation) **helped me confirm that I am supposed to go into law and politics**, and in that way it has changed my life. Before I came here, I knew hardly any parliamentary procedure. Now I know a lot, and I can take that back to my student council." – 2015 Boys Nation participant **Michael McDowell** of Houston.

"**Playing Legion Baseball is one thing I will never regret.** It taught me many things about becoming a great teammate, commitment and taught me how to respect the game. It taught me more than just the game of baseball. It taught me about life, and honoring the community and veterans." – **Danton Hyman**, an outfielder, pitcher and emotional leader for American Legion Baseball champions from Post 193 in South Carolina.

"(My late husband) just loved the outdoors – the wilderness, fishing, camping – and that's not something I particularly care for. But I feel like **it's my obligation as the mother of his children**, and the only parent left for my kids, to bring as much of the things that he liked into our everyday life." – **Ray Dula**, who thanked the 5th District of Georgia for hosting her family and others for a day of fishing and fun.

"(The scholarship) will provide me with an outlet to pursue really my career, my dreams, my passion. Paying for (college) was always a huge concern for me, so now that I have at least a scholarship to help me out, I'm a bit at more at ease. **(The Oratorical Contest has) given me a lot of confidence in myself.** It's a realization that I can do what I put my mind to." – **Geeta Minocha** of Ocala, Fla., the 2015 Oratorical Contest winner.





“(Air rifle shooting has) mainly affected my academic life. Before I started shooting, I had a really low GPA in school. After I started (shooting), that **gave me the inspiration to keep my grades up to stay on the team.**” – **Adam McClintock** of Tucson, Ariz., the 2015 American Legion Junior 3-Position Air Rifle National Sporter Champion.

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Dale Barnett
National Commander

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November 23, 2015 • Issue No. 373

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Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

This time of the year can be very special with festive holidays, fresh memories with families and delicious food. But amid all these festivities, we are more likely to catch the flu.

According to the Center for Disease Control, approximately 200,000 people are hospitalized due to flu-related complications each year. These exposures can happen during travel, a trip to the grocery store, or during family or office gatherings.

This year, it is easier than ever to protect yourself by receiving a no-cost flu shot at Walgreens.

The American Legion is pleased that Walgreens has joined forces with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide enrolled VA patients flu shots at no cost. These flu shots are available through March 31, 2016, while supplies last. However, doctors advise that the sooner you get the flu shot, the better your chances are of protecting yourself throughout the season.

The vaccines, of course, are subject to availability and there may be state, age or health restrictions. Only veterans enrolled in the VA health-care system are eligible – neither family members nor TRICARE members are eligible.

This program makes it easier and more convenient for veterans to avoid the flu, especially those who may live a long distance from the nearest VA facility. Visit your neighborhood Walgreens or go to Walgreens.com/FindAStore to find the nearest location. Walgreens will even send the record of your flu shot to VA as part of the eHealth exchange to ensure that your VA health records are up to date.

Once you find a nearby Walgreens, simply [click here](#) to download the form. Then bring it, along with a photo ID and your VA ID card, to Walgreens.

You can learn more about protecting yourself and your family from the flu this year by visiting www.Walgreens.com/Flu. Visit www.ehealth.va.gov/Immunization.asp for more information regarding this program.

From my family to yours, have a happy and healthy holiday season.

Duty. Honor. Country.





Dale Barnett
National Commander

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National Commander Update

Commander: VA moves 'an insult, disgrace'

Samsung, Legion allies in Korean War legacy

Photo Gallery: Idaho Walk for Veterans and Food Convoy



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November 30, 2015 • Issue No. 374

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Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

Before televisions and central air conditioning ushered people inside after dinner each evening, the front porch was a beloved gathering place for families and friends. Children played in the yard. Adults discussed the day's events. Stories, jokes and opinions were freely exchanged. Neighbors stopped to chat for hours before retiring to their homes for the night.

It was a different time.

That's quite a contrast to today when a text message or Facebook update is quickly sent before moving on to the next urgent matter.

Today's technology has many advantages over the days of old, but sometimes it actually creates a communication disconnect. Like many people, I would not want to surrender my cell phone.

However, no matter how reliant we have become on instant communication, there's still a vital place for one-on-one human interaction.

For certain, the act of sharing a story about a Legion success on social media has great value because you reach so many people so very fast. But at the same time, we should not dismiss or overlook the impact of a one-on-one conversation with a prospective Legion member, public official, media representative or someone who needs to know what the Legion is doing in local communities throughout the nation and beyond.

Our American Legion Family members are working with veterans and helping them with their benefits questions, giving them job leads and volunteer opportunities, assisting the elderly at veterans homes, inspiring youth to participate in our programs, honoring the fallen by volunteering at funeral services and placing flags at gravesites, and working behind the scenes to make communities better.

You may or may not actually be on a front porch when sharing those stories and encouraging eligible veterans to join or inspiring others to get involved. You may be at the gas station, the grocery store, church or a sports event. And don't get me wrong: tell those stories on Facebook and Twitter, too, as well as **our Legiontown USA website**.

No matter the communications technique, the values developed on front porches decades ago – honor, respect, service, community – still resonate for Americans, maybe now more than has been the case in a long time. It's what **The American Legion** does every day.



Regardless of generation, prospective members and potential friends of our organization will feel that same neighborly bond that was shared over a glass of lemonade on the front porch years ago, as long as we make a point to look them in the eye and tell them in person what it means to continue serving.

Duty. Honor. Country.



Dale Barnett
National Commander

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National Commander Update

Commander: 'Veterans are looking for (VA) accountability'

Legion Family leads veterans walk in Hawaii

Commander's Far East trip comes to a close



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Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

Among the freedoms many Americans enjoy is the right to vote for our elected officials. This year, of course, is generating intense interest because a new president will be elected. Additionally, voters will elect every single member of the U.S. House of Representatives and one-third of the U.S. Senate.

Right now we are entering a critical and exciting juncture as the two major political parties begin to hold primaries and caucuses to determine the front-runners for their nominations. Strong opinions can be found everywhere. Unfortunately, so too can some mistruths. Many political groups were created specifically to spin facts, distort reality and twist words to propel their candidates into office. The American Legion, as a nonpartisan organization, assumes a role of neutrality amid the storm of political rhetoric and images.



As individuals, we are free like anyone to vote as we wish and support the candidates we think best.

But as Legionnaires, we have **a duty to participate in the election process** and encourage others to exercise one of the most important freedoms we, and those who served in uniform before us, fought to protect: the freedom to vote.

On the local level, an American Legion post can take on a greater role in its community by organizing and hosting a political forum or debate among candidates. Remember that any such event must be open to all who are running for a particular office, and the Legion cannot promote any one candidate. When posts are using their facilities for such events, they should remove the emblem and Legion flag to avoid the impression of endorsement for any candidate. (Note that renting out hall space to a political campaign is still fair game, as long as it is not presented as an American Legion-sponsored event.)

Here are some reminders from the Legion's **Get Out the Vote brochure**:

1. When hosting a voter registration drive, information and applications must be offered and available to all eligible voters.
2. Legionnaires may express partisan views, but they must do so when they are not wearing the Legion cap or other Legion attire, and without a direct connection to an American Legion post.
3. American Legion posts may coordinate forums or debates. However, posts cannot

endorse or oppose a candidate, or coordinate activities with a candidate without giving his/her opponent the same opportunity.

Following these guidelines will keep the Legion above the fray without sacrificing any member's right to participate in the democratic process. It is my hope that each of you do participate in the election process individually, and posts take the lead in their communities by arranging fair debates or "meet the candidates" forums to help all of our citizens fulfill a right too often taken for granted.

Duty. Honor. Country.



Dale Barnett
National Commander



National Commander Update

Amid devastation, Legion offers hope

Membership: In the green

American Legion commander encourages
Walk for Veterans events



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Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

Veterans and servicemembers who have sacrificed so much to protect our country absolutely deserve quality health care, timely delivery of their benefits and a 21st century electronic medical records system.

Sadly, that is not the case in 2016 in America.

The quagmires that some veterans encounter at their Department of Veterans Affairs facilities are well documented. Congress has passed legislation in an effort to solidify the ability of VA to terminate managers and employees who don't have veterans' best interests in mind. Yet, that solution has fallen short of creating real change.

At the same time, our veterans deserve significant advancements in the care they receive at VA. Veterans in rural areas should have better options for accessing health care. Women veterans need improved services. Innovations in treatment should be developed for those suffering the signature wounds of modern warfare – PTSD and TBI injuries.

It all comes down to accountability. VA, Congress, DoD and the American public all need to be accountable to those who have served, or who are still serving.

You will hear a lot about accountability this week during The American Legion's Washington Conference.

It is a message that I will convey to American Legion Family members during the Commander's Call at 8 a.m. Tuesday, Feb. 23. (The event will be **livestreamed on the Internet here.**)

On Wednesday, I will carry the message of accountability to a joint session of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs' Committees. You can participate in the **Legion's social media "Thunderclap" campaign** as my testimony begins at 10 a.m. Wednesday, Feb. 24. Thunderclap is a way for social media users to join forces to promote a campaign or event. (**Here are some details on how it works** for Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr users.)

It is time for trust in VA to be restored. It is time for veterans to seamlessly receive their benefits.



It is time for accountability.



Duty. Honor. Country.



Dale Barnett
National Commander

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National Commander Update

[Legion Family vows to keep Lincoln's promise](#)

[Join the Legion's Thunderclap](#)

[Watch Commander's Call live on Feb. 23](#)



February 22, 2016 • Issue No. 378

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Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

Birthdays give us an opportunity to reflect on our past year and look toward the future with optimism. As we pause this week to **celebrate The American Legion's 97th birthday**, it serves as a good time to reflect on a year filled with successes.

- We have presented our legislative agenda to Congress and called for accountability when it comes to ensuring every veteran receives proper and timely benefits.
- Our American Legion service officers have provided valuable assistance to veterans and their families, often guiding them through the complicated claims process at no cost.
- We have held more than 20 **Walks for Veterans** from Puerto Rico to Hollywood, California, to five state Capitols to a frozen lake in Minnesota to the heat of Arizona. Along the way, we have walked to raise awareness of the needs of our veterans.
- At job fairs and other events coordinated, sponsored and/or hosted by The American Legion, transitioning servicemembers have received job offers, guidance on launching their own businesses and assistance with their resumes.
- The Legion's Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW) program has helped secure worthwhile items for wounded servicemembers and veterans. For example, OCW provided new bicycles last December to the wounded warrior unit at Balboa Hospital in California after a theft. Additionally, donations delivered **a service dog to Army veteran James Harris**, who desperately needed one.
- Legion members and posts have played significant roles in getting more homeless veterans off the streets and into productive lives. Among them: The Maryland Center for Veterans Education and Training, which works hand-in-hand with a local Legion post.
- Countless children have been assisted by Legion programs. Boys State/Nation participants have come away with a greater understanding of how government should work. Oratorical contestants have learned - and demonstrated - a strong grasp of our Constitution. Legion Baseball players have grown as athletes, leaders and young men while playing a game they love.



- And we have continued to educate citizens about our core beliefs - service, honor, patriotism.

We have more work to do in the coming year. We must continue to fight to ensure that all veterans receive the benefits they have earned. We must continue to hold VA, Congress, DoD and others responsible. We must continue to provide resources for servicemembers who are returning to civilian life. And we must continue to fight to keep the American flag safe from desecration.

But now is the time to raise a toast, have a slice of birthday cake and enjoy the company of friends. Happy birthday, American Legion. And for all of you who work tirelessly throughout the year on the Legion's behalf, thank you.

Duty. Honor. Country.



Dale Barnett
National Commander

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National Commander Update

'Walking for those who marched for us'

Video: Legion testifies at South Carolina Statehouse

Legion to Congress: VA accountability means action, not just words



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Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

Natural disasters can strike at any time. Tornadoes, super-storms, floods and fires can obliterate a family's home and cause unimaginable stress and despair. They occur in communities big and small from coast to coast.

Victims of these disasters need our help. When their lives are turned upside-down, they are left to ask: Where do I find shelter? How will I pay for meals? How can I put my life back together?

The American Legion provides immediate relief for victims through **its National Emergency Fund**. Legion Family members quickly assist with funds and volunteer help, working alongside community leaders and Team Rubicon veterans to provide shelter and meals in their local communities.



Since it was formally adopted in 1989, The American Legion's NEF program has provided immediate cash grants for veterans and posts that have been affected by tornadoes, floods, hurricanes and other natural disasters.

To date, the Legion has provided more than \$8.5 million in NEF grants. These generous gifts in times of need are made possible by your donations. I encourage you to **help keep the fund viable** in times of disaster by making a donation as part of my \$1 million fundraising initiative.

In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, qualified recipients are eligible for up to \$3,000 and Legion posts can receive up to \$10,000. There are countless stories of how NEF grants have helped disaster victims.

Take Willie Scott, whose **home was demolished by a tornado in Birmingham, Ala.**, nearly five years ago.



"Thank God for The American Legion," Scott says. "It means a hell of a lot that there are organizations that aren't all about taking; they are about giving. I'm proud of the Legion and I'm proud to be a member of the Legion."

No matter how widespread a disaster turns out to be, The American Legion and its National Emergency Fund will be there when the need is greatest.

Duty. Honor. Country.



Dale Barnett
National Commander

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National Commander Update

Sunshine prevails during Florida walk

Commander calls for U.S. leadership,
strength after Brussels attacks

Expand the definition of accountability



April 01, 2016 • Issue No. 380

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Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

“To consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness.”

That last line from The American Legion's Preamble to the Constitution underscores much of what our organization represents in communities all across this great nation.

We can see the benefits of mutual helpfulness in the eyes of those who receive assistance from The American Legion. A resident at a veterans home attended to by a younger VA Volunteer Services Legionnaire. A victim of a natural disaster receives immediate financial assistance via the Legion's National Emergency Fund. And a young man learns lifelong leadership skills at American Legion Boys State.



The list goes on and on. But last week at Spring Meetings in Indianapolis, the National Executive Committee approved a very important change to the Legacy Scholarship Fund that will expand the roster of those receiving assistance. In simple terms, **the Legion is increasing the pool of scholarship applicants** to include children of post 9/11 veterans with disability ratings of 50 percent or higher.

Make no mistake: the children of post 9/11 veterans who made the ultimate sacrifice will remain the top priority for Legacy Scholarship aid. But by expanding the eligibility requirements, the Legion will continue to provide for the children of the men and women who face the harsh realities of war wounds every day of their lives.

While the changes are immediate, in practical terms, they will not take place until the 2017 scholarship year. The 2016 Legacy Scholarship winners were selected at the recent Spring Meetings. Those who qualify under the new rules have until the application deadline of April 20, 2017, to apply.

The expansion of this program is occurring, thanks to its success and to the dedication of our American Legion Riders. Throughout the years of the Legacy Run, the Riders have shown a tremendous commitment to aiding students in need.

Among those students who received assistance from the Legion's Legacy Scholarships is Eva Marie Witt of Ohio. “The scholarship pays honor and tribute to my father, and I am just so thankful that I've been able to pay for my college and not have that extra worry and stress on top of everything I'm already dealing with.”

Thanks to the Riders, donors and everyone else who contributes to this rewarding program, there will be more deserving students receiving scholarships in the future.

Duty. Honor. Country.



Dale Barnett
National Commander

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National Commander Update

Commander: Don't dismantle VA, fix it

Barnett tours home of 'Father of West Point'

Legion leadership challenged to educate department wide



May 10, 2016 • Issue No. 381

THE AMERICAN LEGION

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Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

This time of the year is perhaps the most fitting and best representation of the slogan I chose for my year as national commander – Duty. Honor. Country.

As Memorial Day approaches, it's a time when we think about our brothers and sisters we served with who are no longer with us. Perhaps we remember a battle buddy who we served with. Maybe we think back to someone we bonded with during basic training. Or we might recall someone who made the ultimate sacrifice so that others could live in freedom.

No matter which heroes fill our hearts and minds when we reflect, we are indebted to them and their families every day of the year.

I hope you will join me this Memorial Day in honoring their memories. Say a silent prayer for their families. Participate in a community remembrance service. Share their stories so that others will understand what freedom, patriotism and service really mean.

To all of my brothers and sisters in The American Legion Family, take time this Memorial Day weekend to help remind all Americans that freedom is not free. There is a price for the liberties we enjoy. We know that the true meaning of this holiday is much more than barbecues, picnics and mattress sales.

No matter your plans, or those of your friends and neighbors, I encourage you to lead or participate in remembrance and ceremonies in your communities at this time. We shall never forget.

Duty. Honor. Country.

Dale Barnett
National Commander



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National Commander Update

Raising awareness and offering thanks

Help pass flag amendment legislation

Walk brings out 'camaraderie' in Nebraska

Hundreds walk with national commander in Georgia



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Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

It's been a long time since many of us have donned caps and gowns for graduation ceremonies. Still, as a retired history teacher, this time of year summons special memories.

Millions of young people have recently gone through commencement exercises, both for high school and college graduations. Many of those with diplomas in hand have Harry Colmery to thank.

The past national commander of The American Legion is, of course, the architect of one of the greatest pieces of legislation in U.S. history: **the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944.**



Dale Barnett
 National Commander
 The American Legion

When Colmery sat down at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C., to draft the legislation, the White House and Congress were well aware of the impending issue. The U.S. government was unprepared to handle the massive economic jolt that would come when the GIs of World War II came home.

Hundreds of bills had already been introduced to address the needs and problems faced by servicemembers who had already returned home. But none had provided what the World War II veterans needed after defeating evil in Europe and the Pacific. There were still no tangible benefits for those returning home who had given years of their lives to defend American and liberate millions of others around the world.

Opponents of the legislation were easy to find at the time. Critics argued that a full year of unemployment benefits would turn veterans into slackers. Colmery remained firm: "The American Legion has not lost faith in the veterans."

And thanks to Colmery, the GI Bill came to be.

It's hard to precisely quantify the impact of the GI Bill. But for starters, we know that millions of U.S. servicemen and women have used the benefit, or updated versions that are helping today's newly minted veterans. The GI Bill has helped launch countless small businesses. It made college educations affordable for veterans. And it improved health-care services and benefits for disabled veterans.

Our nation owes a great deal of thanks to Colmery for his efforts. And, this week his contributions will be commemorated in Topeka, Kan., with **the dedication of Harry Colmery Memorial Park.** The ceremony will be held on June 22, fittingly the anniversary



of the signing of the bill that changed so many lives.

Keith Howard-Streicher, who served four years in the U.S. Army, is among post 9/11 veterans who have used the GI Bill. "If I didn't have the GI Bill, honestly I wouldn't be where I am today. If I didn't have that money for school, I wouldn't have these opportunities. I thank God for the GI Bill. It really has changed my life."

Duty. Honor. Country.



Dale Barnett
National Commander

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National Commander Update

Veterans want strong, robust VA

A lesson for future generations

Legionnaires at La Fiere

Agreement protects memorial site in Normandy



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Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

For some students, summer represents a time to push aside responsibilities and personal growth. Instead, they frequent the pool or beach, stay up late and hang out with friends.

Of course, we all need some R&R in our lives. But, thanks to American Legion programs and the volunteers who guide them, tens of thousands of young people are gaining experiences that will help shape their lives. The Legion's youth programs are second to none when it comes to mentoring kids and molding them into our future leaders.

The list of prominent alumni from the Legion's most popular youth programs is impressive. Consider that former President Bill Clinton, Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito, NBA player and coach Phil Jackson, astronaut Neil Armstrong and NBC news anchor Tom Brokaw are among those who attended Boys State. Additionally, there are more than 60 former American Legion Baseball players enshrined in the Baseball Hall of Fame, including Yogi Berra, Greg Maddux and Ted Williams. And the Junior Shooting Sports program helped give rise to Olympic gold medalist Jamie Lynn Gray.



Dale Barnett
 National Commander
 The American Legion

It's not only the leadership qualities that emerge in these Legion programs. Alumni forever remember the bonds they made during their time in our programs.

Jackie Bradley Jr., an emerging star outfielder for the Boston Red Sox, played for American Legion Post 146 in Hopewell, Va., from 2006-2008.

"The experiences and the people that I got to meet – second to none," **Bradley said in an interview at spring training.** "A lot of the coaches, I still stay in contact with to this day. The relationships that formed over the years – they're still intact. (They) still come see me."

And for today's generation – for whom it will only be a matter of time until they make an impressionable mark on society – the programs provide energy and enthusiasm.

Take Brett Barrick, for example, who recently was among nearly 100 young men who participated in **Oregon Boys State in Salem.** He wasn't sure that one week was enough to make an impact.

"They weren't exaggerating when they coined the phrase, 'the week that can shape a

lifetime,'" Barrick said. "I am humbled by the people I have encountered, the things I've witnessed, the things I've been a part of in this week. In five days, I feel like I've already made a difference on the rest of my life."

And, I am humbled when I see Legionnaires give their time to the future leaders of tomorrow. You have my gratitude whether you work the concession stand at a Legion Baseball game, teach a young person gun safety at a Junior Shooting Sports club, serve as a counselor at Boys State or stay involved some other way.

Thanks to the efforts of our American Legion Family, our nation's youth has a bright future indeed.

Duty. Honor. Country.



Dale Barnett
National Commander

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National Commander Update

American Legion: 'Prayers for law enforcement; violence must end'

Wisconsin Legionnaires 'band' together to raise awareness

Legion to Congress: Veterans want strong, robust VA



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Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

In a recent prime time speech, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani spoke of the role law enforcement officers play in American society.

“We pray for our police officers in Dallas and Baton Rouge and their families. And we say thank you to the Cleveland Police Department for protecting us ...We know the risk you are taking, and we say thank you to every police officer and law enforcement agent who is out tonight protecting us – black, white, Latino, of every race, every color, every creed, every sexual orientation. When they come to save your life, they don't ask if you are black or white. They just come to save you!”



In a nation that seems to be more divided than any time since the 1960s, it is important to point out The American Legion's strong and longtime support for law enforcement. In the Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion, Legionnaires pledge to “maintain law and order.”

It is in this spirit that The American Legion annually **honors a Law Enforcement Officer of the Year** at our national convention. Departments and many posts also recognize men and women in blue with awards. Some posts recognize these heroes quarterly and, even better yet, some do it monthly.

Some recent troubling videos provide evidence that out of more than 1.1 million law enforcement officers nationwide, some are unworthy to wear the badge. Split-second mistakes are made, but to tarnish an entire profession because of the misdeeds of a few is as unfair as allowing the actions taken at My Lai to define the 99 percent of Vietnam War veterans who served bravely and honorably.

Sadly, shootings by and of police officers seem to dominate news today. But I see another side to law enforcement officers. They are our neighbors, our friends, our family. They go to our churches, send their kids to our local schools and coach youth soccer teams. Like the rest of us, they want to live in safe communities.

Effingham, Ill., Sheriff David Mahon is the 2016 American Legion National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year. I look forward to presenting him with his award when we meet next month in Cincinnati. But it isn't just the nearly three decades in law enforcement that makes Mahon a valued member of the community. It's also the tens of thousands of dollars that he has raised for Special Olympics Illinois.

The mission statement of the Effingham County Sheriff's Department promises to



“provide a safe environment by enforcing the laws of our government and preserving the peace of our citizens with Integrity, Service and Professionalism.”

Mission accomplished.

Duty. Honor. Country.



Dale Barnett
National Commander

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National Commander Update

Wisconsin Legionnaires 'band' together to raise awareness

Upcoming Walk for Veterans events

Legion to Congress: Veterans want strong, robust VA



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Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

As the legislative days of the 114th Congress dwindle, there is still vital legislation for lawmakers to address. At the top of the list is legislation to address VA's benefits appeals process.

With the help of The American Legion, the benefit appeals process at VA must be fixed and brought into the 21st century.

Take action: [Click here to contact your members of Congress](#)

The American Legion is deeply connected with and concerned about the appeals process. Currently, the Legion holds power of attorney on about 750,000 veterans claimants. The Legion spends more than \$2 million a year on veterans claims, appeals processing and assistance. Our membership should take great pride in the Legion's high success rate for assisting veterans with their claims and appeals.



But the Legion's charge goes well beyond assisting individual veterans. We have an obligation to ensure that the institutions and systems that serve veterans are working as intended. And when they are not, we step up to help fix them.

When the claims backlog grew to tremendous levels several years back, the Legion worked with Congress and VA to address it so that VA disability benefits and services would be provided in a timely and efficient manner. That effort resulted in a reduction in backlogged claims by almost 90 percent. For veterans, that means better and faster claims decisions.

But as VA has become more efficient in claims processing, the number of veterans seeking appeals has risen proportionally. That has revealed the unworkability of a process that too often churns claims rather than providing timely appeals decisions for veterans. Unquestionably, the appeals process is time-consuming and frustrating for vets.

Earlier this year, The American Legion, along with other major veterans service organizations, state and county service officers, veterans advocate attorneys and others worked with senior VA officials from the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Board of Veterans Appeals to design the framework of legislation to simplify and expedite the appeals process.

The result was the **VA Appeals Modernization Act of 2016**. The legislation would provide veterans with a simple, fair and transparent appeals process in which the vast majority would receive a final appeals decision within one year of filing an appeal. We are proud of this legislation. Now we need your help to get it signed into law.

A CALL TO ACTION

As my year as American Legion national commander draws to a close, I am reaching out to you for assistance. Most U.S. senators and representatives will be on recess in their home districts to meet with constituents now through Labor Day. This is a great opportunity for you to visit your elected officials' local offices and advise them of yours and the Legion's concerns on this important matter.

Let your elected officials know that VA's benefits appeals process needs to be reformed now. The status quo isn't acceptable. The American Legion strongly urges congressional action on appeals modernization when lawmakers return to Washington in September.

This call to action is the first in a series of actions we will take as we work toward passage of this legislation. Please expect to receive and act upon them when you hear the call.

When I began my journey last year as your commander, I asked American Legion Family members to make the most of their time. I again challenge each of you today to dedicate yourself to the principles of my motto: Duty. Honor. Country.

Help your fellow veterans by **joining the call to action now** to modernize VA's appeals process.

Duty. Honor. Country.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dale Barnett". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dale" being more prominent than the last name "Barnett".

Dale Barnett
National Commander

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National Commander Update

A generous start to the Legacy Run

Iowa Walk for Veterans: 'A capstone of a great year'

'We have a lot to give'

Privatizing VA is not the answer



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