THE AMERICAN LEGION

POSITIONS AND PROGRAMS

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

2019 - 2020

INTRODUCTION

How to use this booklet

"Positions and Programs of The American Legion" is a guide to the organization's stances on current issues of concern, as well as a reference to programs of national interest. It is written so that its various sections can be quickly melded into brief or extended remarks for presentations to various audiences, from Legion Family gatherings to media.

The booklet's handy size makes it easy to carry or lay flat on a lectern when you are called upon to address an audience. It has enough information on a variety of subjects to make it the perfect guide for crafting speeches on important topics. You might also mark several pages and speak directly from the pamphlet.

When speaking on multiple topics, you can easily shift subjects with transitional phrases such as: "*another topic we should consider is …*"; "*we are also very interested in …*"; "*of course, we shouldn't forget …*"; or "*in addition to these pressing veterans' issues, The American Legion continues to provide support to ….*"

Here are some suggestions on supplementing the material in this guide:

- Add your own personal anecdotes to make remarks more interesting to the audience.
- Mention outstanding accomplishments of people who are present.
- Localize topics by referring, for example, to a nearby VA health-care facility or a community American Legion Riders event.

The American Legion is the nation's leading veterans service organization because it is diverse. There are enough positions and programs to choose from in this guide to fit the interests of your audience. If you wish to learn more about a particular position or program, contact the national staff or find more information at ***legion.org***.

This pamphlet is updated annually. If you have suggestions for improvements or additions, send them to the Media & Communications Division, American Legion National Headquarters, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206 or ***magazine@legion.org***.

CONTENTS

POSITIONS

Defense. 2
National Security 4
Employment & Education. 6
Flag Amendment 8
VA Reform 10
Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation 12

PROGRAMS

Amateur Radio 16
American Legion Riders 17
Americanism, Children & Youth. 18
Legacy Scholarship. 22
Blue & Gold Star Banners. 24
Membership 26
National Emergency Fund 28
Operation Comfort Warriors. 30
Sons of The American Legion 32
Temporary Financial Assistance 34
Troop Support 36

POSITIONS

Defense

National Security

Employment & Education

Flag Amendment

VA Reform

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

DEFENSE

The U.S. Armed Forces have been stretched thin by 18 years of war and contingency operations that have strained readiness, capacity, and capability across all services. While The American Legion has always supported a strong, fully-funded military, it is essential that Congress, the White House and the Department of Defense (DoD) work together to create a stable, predictable multi-year budget – one that addresses near-term needs like munitions and spare parts while also planning and preparing for long-term national security needs such as weapons-platform modernization of carriers, ballistic missile submarines, long-range bombers and more.

Among The American Legion's positions and concerns about DoD funding are:

National defense budget: The American Legion views a strong national defense as paramount to national security. Not only should defense budgets be robust and sufficient to deter threats from all potential adversaries, but funding should be approved far in advance, and military members should not have their pay interrupted in the event of a federal government shutdown. Although the U.S. Coast Guard falls under the Department of Homeland Security, The American Legion believes that Congress should pass the Pay Our Coast Guard Act to ensure that Coast Guard members will be paid like their DoD counterparts during shutdowns.

Military health care: The American Legion categorically rejects any increases in co-pays, cost-sharing, and any other fees associated with TRICARE programs and supports closing gaps in coverage for National Guard and reserve forces.

Readiness: Readiness remains a critical challenge for all branches of the U.S. military. The American Legion supports an across-the-board increase in service end strength, particularly in career fields that have borne the brunt of overwork due to a continuously high operations tempo, as well as all necessary funds to restore capacity and capability to the armed forces.

Quality of life: Quality-of-life programs are essential to the well-being of U.S. servicemembers and their families, and provide critical support during this time of frequent and extended deployments across the force. The American Legion supports continued funding for family support, commissaries and exchanges, and morale, welfare and recreation activities.

POW/MIA accounting: The American Legion continues to support full funding for the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) in its mission to recover and identify fallen American servicemembers from battlefields around the world.

*For more information, email **ns@legion.org**.*

NATIONAL SECURITY

A strong national defense is one of the four pillars upon which The American Legion was founded. It remains a key focus of the organization. We live in an era of nontraditional threats, from extremist organizations to cyber criminals to organized crime, that exist alongside traditional great powers like China and Russia. In this complex environment, it is essential that our national security system be vigilant and forward-looking. The American Legion is dedicated to ensuring that the United States is capable of handling current as well as emerging threats, wherever they may arise.

Cybersecurity: The global reliance on information systems makes cybersecurity an essential component of national security. Cyberthreats from criminal and state actors continue to multiply, requiring a unified, whole-government approach that addresses network defense, training, and information-sharing across the spectrum of federal, state, municipal and private entities.

Indo-Pacific: The third priority of the defense secretary's National Defense Strategy is to strengthen alliances and attract new partners. Mutually beneficial alliances and partnerships provide a durable, asymmetric strategic advantage that no competitor or rival can match. The American Legion supports the expansion of Indo-Pacific alliances and partnerships. A free and open Indo-Pacific region provides prosperity and security for all. We are working with DoD to strengthen alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific with a networked security architecture capable of deterring aggression, maintaining stability and ensuring free access to common domains. Bilateral and multilateral security relationships can be achieved to preserve a free, open international system.

Transnational organized crime: Global criminal networks are a persistent threat to public safety, good governance and national security in the United States. The American Legion supports government efforts that treat organized crime seriously and calls for additional resources for law enforcement and the justice system to effectively investigate, prosecute and break up criminal groups.

"4+1" threats: Russia, China, Iran, North Korea and terrorist organizations round out the top threats to national security as identified by DoD. The American Legion supports full utilization of all tools of U.S. power – military, diplomatic, economic and cultural – to deter aggression and fight and win wars.

The American Legion programs: Blood donor drives, disaster preparedness education, Law Enforcement Officer of the Year and Firefighter of the Year awards, Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps and Spirit of Service awards are examples of how American Legion volunteers support their communities and honor the achievements of first responders, military personnel and future leaders.

Secure borders: The American Legion supports legal immigration but strongly opposes amnesty and tax-funded benefits for those who have entered the country illegally. The American Legion believes in effectively and comprehensively tracking and screening all foreign visitors, securing U.S. points of entry and eliminating job magnets by sanctioning those who employ illegal workers.

EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION

The American Legion's Veterans Employment & Education Commission plays a vital nationwide role in helping veterans and their families make the transition to rewarding civilian lives and careers. This area of American Legion advocacy addresses:

- Education and training
- Licensing and verification
- Employment programs and services
- Small business development
- Homelessness

As more individuals leave active-duty service, they look to The American Legion for guidance to make the transition to rewarding careers. On this front, The American Legion:

- Works closely with campus veterans centers to ensure an adequate support network is available at colleges for those using their GI Bill benefits. This initiative has spurred growth in the number of American Legion campus posts around the country.
- Sponsors, promotes and produces hundreds of veterans career fairs nationwide, working with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, JobZone, DoD, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Labor, among other groups and agencies dedicated to veteran employment. American Legion posts also conduct hundreds of veteran career fairs and job-counseling activities across the country every year.
- Oversees federal veteran hiring initiatives, ensuring that agencies are complying with veterans' preference hiring laws and that VA meets and exceeds its goals for veteran hires.
- Offers small-business counseling services to veteran entrepreneurs seeking to obtain VA's veteran-owned small business status.

- Provides oversight for programs under the Department of Labor's Jobs for Veterans State Grants funding stream, ensuring that programs and services administered to veterans are funded and managed in a manner most beneficial to veterans.
- Coordinates a Small Business Task Force, consisting of successful entrepreneurs who offer their fellow veterans guidance on business development, including workshops during the Legion's annual Washington Conference and national convention. Task force members also provide consultation about the federal contract procurement process and other opportunities available to veteran-owned businesses.
- Testifies frequently on Capitol Hill in support of legislation and promotes national programs that help veterans pursue civilian careers, such as Veterans Preference hiring and Small Business Administration initiatives specifically for veterans. The American Legion also works closely with Congress and VA to continue strengthening the Post-9/11 GI Bill.
- Works at the federal and state levels to allow veterans to transfer their military experience into training credits for certification in a number of specialized career paths and trades, from emergency medical response to long-haul driving.
- Assists transitioning veterans and servicemembers with finding meaningful employment through the recently created American Legion Employment Innovation Task Force.
- Works diligently at the national and local levels in support of housing programs, stand-downs and other activities that aim to give homeless veterans the opportunity for self-sufficience.

*For more information, email **vee&e@legion.org**.*

FLAG AMENDMENT

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that flag desecration is protected speech after a self-proclaimed communist was charged with desecrating the U.S. flag. The 1989 *Texas v. Johnson* case invalidated laws against flag desecration in 48 states and the District of Columbia. The American Legion and veterans were outraged that the Court, in a 5-4 ruling, took away the fundamental right for the people to protect their flag.

The American Legion strongly supports a constitutional amendment that would return to the states the right to protect the U.S. flag.

For more than 20 years, The American Legion and the Citizens Flag Alliance, a coalition of more than 120 organizations, have championed the passage of a narrowly drawn constitutional amendment that would protect the flag. Such an amendment has passed the House of Representatives six times but fallen short of the necessary two-thirds supermajority required in the Senate. In 2006, the amendment fell only one vote short in the Senate.

Polls have shown that a majority of the American people support a flag-protection amendment. Additionally, every state legislature has appealed in writing to the U.S. Congress for passage of a flag amendment that can be sent to the states for ratification.

House Joint Resolution 65 and Senate Joint Resolution 49 were introduced during the current Congress. The measures simply state, "The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States." The American Legion supports these measures and will continue to fight for the flag under which all veterans served. By contacting members of Congress, the American Legion Family can advocate for a vote on this important issue and call on congressional candidates to state for the record where they stand on the flag amendment.

The greatest tragedy in flag desecration is the disrespect it teaches children – disrespect for the values it embodies and disrespect for those who have sacrificed for those values. Disrespect is the genesis of hate. It provokes the dissolution of national unity symbolized by the flag.

The U.S. flag is good enough to cover the coffins of our fallen military and law-enforcement heroes; it is good enough to warrant protection.

The argument that flag desecration is a form of free speech is flawed. Flag desecration is behavior, not speech.

*For more information, email **cfa@legion.org**.*

VA REFORM

Since its formation, The American Legion has fought for compassionate care and treatment of U.S. military veterans and their families. It was instrumental in the consolidation of various federal agencies and bureaus into what became the Veterans Administration in 1930 and later evolved into the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in 1989.

Throughout its relationship with VA, The American Legion has represented important stakeholders – veterans and their families – by providing oversight, consultation and constructive criticism through many peaks and valleys. The American Legion works with VA and veteran stakeholders nationwide to achieve strategic solutions and steps toward modernizing the nation's largest veterans health-care system and updating the benefits appeals process. More than five years have passed since the VA wait-time scandal and The American Legion's call for the resignations of the VA secretary and two undersecretaries.

VA continues to struggle with access, staffing and claims-processing backlogs. The American Legion remains committed to helping VA in its reform efforts.

The American Legion is dedicated to ensuring that VA's Caregiver Program includes all veterans who meet the congressional requirements, regardless when they served.

The VA MISSION Act, fully supported by The American Legion, was passed by Congress and signed by the president in 2019. The VA Maintaining Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act (MISSION) includes the most significant VA reforms in decades.

Before the MISSION Act, VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, which provides a monthly stipend to primary caregivers, was limited to veterans injured on or after Sept. 11, 2001.

Section 161 of the law expands eligibility to include veterans with a serious injury incurred or aggravated in the line of duty in the active military, naval or air service on or before May 7, 1975. Following a two-year period from which the VA secretary submits to Congress the certification of a fully implemented information technology system, eligibility will be expanded to include all veterans with serious injuries incurred or aggravated in the line of duty in the active military, naval or air service on or after May 7, 1975, and before Sept. 11, 2001.

The American Legion fully supported the MISSION Act and strongly believes all veterans who are in need of personal care services should be eligible for this benefit.

VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION

As the nation's largest veterans service organization advocating for a stronger VA, The American Legion represents veterans and their families in all matters related to government benefits. The American Legion believes VA provides high-quality health care; timely access to that care, however, remains a serious issue. The organization's network of more than 3,000 accredited service officers assists veterans and their families in applications for various benefits. The services provided are free, regardless of membership status or eligibility.

Among the key issues on the agenda of The American Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission are:

- Mental health services that include non-pharmaceutical treatments and alternative therapies for post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury and military sexual trauma.
- Treatments tailored to meet the individual needs of affected veterans and their entire families, as recommended by The American Legion's TBI-PTSD Committee.
- Further research into the use of medical cannabis in states where it is legal for medicinal purposes as an alternative therapy.
- The VA secretary identified suicide prevention among veterans as his highest clinical priority, and The American Legion established a Suicide Prevention Program in support of that priority by raising attention about veteran suicide and working to eliminate it by examining recent trends of veteran suicide as it relates to TBI, PTSD, MST and pain. The program is charged with analyzing best practices in veteran suicide prevention not currently used by DoD or VA for the purpose of encouraging government adoption of them.

- VA must build new VA health-care facilities that meet space and budget requirements and are also activated on time so they meet the health-care needs of growing veteran populations in given areas.
- Medical records must follow a veteran from military enlistment throughout life. Moreover, health information technology must be effectively used for storage and retrieval of medical records regardless of an individual's status in DoD or VA. VA must adjudicate benefit claims with higher accuracy and standards of performance throughout all regional offices.
- The American Legion works with VA in support of the Fully Developed Claims process and the Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP), which streamline applications and accelerates decisions.
- The American Legion's System Worth Saving program conducts site visits at VA medical facilities to assess quality and timeliness of veterans health care and gather feedback from veterans on their experiences. The American Legion compiles an annual publication that is distributed to the president, Congress, VA officials and American Legion leadership.
- VA health-care services for women veterans remain unequal to those for men. While VA has made some progress in this area, proper staffing must be provided for gender-specific care. The American Legion is working closely with VA and Congress to ensure smooth implementation of the VA MISSION Act, which addresses this issue among its reforms.
- The American Legion recommends all VA health-care facilities employ medical professionals and clinicians who can provide military sexual trauma screenings and assist in the claims process for women.

*For more information, email **var@legion.org**.*

PROGRAMS

Amateur Radio

American Legion Riders

Americanism, Children & Youth

Legacy Scholarship

Blue & Gold Star Banners

Membership

National Emergency Fund

Operation Comfort Warriors

Sons of The American Legion

Temporary Financial Assistance

Troop Support

AMERICAN LEGION AMATEUR RADIO

The American Legion Amateur Radio Club (TALARC) comprises nearly 4,000 members of The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion who possess federally issued licenses as amateur radio operators. The club promotes The American Legion through the art and science of amateur radio; encourages posts to participate in local disaster preparedness and emergency communications operations; serves as a national emergency communications resource in conjunction with the Department of Homeland Security or state and local emergency management agencies; and encourages youth in the exploration of science and technology through amateur radio.

The American Legion National Headquarters station was established in 2011. Under the FCC call sign K9TAL, the club operates as a "special-event" station on Veterans Day and The American Legion's birthday, trading shortwave calls with amateur radio operators worldwide. TALARC members also run regional and national practice radio nets over a variety of bands and modes and actively participate in Jamboree-on-the-Air, the largest Scouting event in the world.

TALARC has a webpage, **legion.org/hamradio**, where licensed amateur radio members of the American Legion Family can apply for free membership in TALARC. Post leaders can also learn how to form an active post program, joining the 40 American Legion posts and departments around the nation with organized amateur radio activities.

*For more information, email **k9tal@legion.org**.*

AMERICAN LEGION RIDERS

The American Legion Riders (ALR) program is a nationally recognized association of American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion members who enjoy the sport and comradeship of motorcycling. It supports the aims and objectives of The American Legion along with local, state and national programs and charities. ALR is one of the most visible of American Legion activities, reminding the public of the honorable nature of military service.

Like so many other successful national programs, the American Legion Riders simply started with an idea at a local post. In 1993, members of Garden City, Mich., Post 396 conducted a motorcycle activity to raise money and advance the post's causes. Word quickly spread. Within months, new ALR chapters were forming at posts nationwide. Chapters now exist in all 55 departments of The American Legion, with many outside the United States. There are now an estimated 121,000 Riders and 2,250 local chapters worldwide.

ALR annually conducts the American Legion Legacy Run, a cross-country multi-day motorcycle event. As many as 500 participants ride more than 1,000 miles from a predetermined starting point, ending at the national convention city. Since 2006, the Legacy Run, along with other state and local fundraising activities conducted by the Riders, has raised more than $16 million for the American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund. These American Legion Family members truly are "Riding for America's Future."

*For more information, email **legionriders@legion.org**.*

The American Legion operates and sponsors hundreds of youth programs and patriotic community activities for all ages. These include American Legion Boys State and Boys Nation, Oratorical Contests, American Legion Baseball, flag education, the School Award Medal Program, the Child Welfare Foundation and more.

American Legion Boys State and American Legion Boys Nation

American Legion Boys State is the nation's most respected educational program of government instruction for high school students. Selected high school juniors participate in model states, mirroring the structures and operations of their respective state governments. Launched in 1935, 49 states and the District of Columbia conduct this program, serving nearly 19,000 young men each year.

Two outstanding delegates from each Boys State program are invited to participate in American Legion Boys Nation. Conducted annually near Washington, D.C., the program centers on the federal government and its supporting agencies. Alumni include past and present members of Congress, state governors and even a former U.S. president.

The American Legion Auxiliary sponsors similar programs for young women through Girls State and Girls Nation.

American Legion Baseball

Founded in 1925, American Legion Baseball strives to teach practical lessons in sportsmanship, citizenship, loyalty, respect, fair play, courage and physical fitness. More than 3,500 teams serve nearly 60,000 young athletes participating in all U.S. states and Canada.

State championship teams annually enter tournament competition, vying to play in the American Legion World Series in Shelby, N.C., which is broadcast live on ESPN. Many successful major leaguers have played American Legion Baseball. Alumni include 81 Hall of Famers and current stars such as Kris Bryant, Bryce Harper, Corey Seager and Justin Verlander.

Youth Cadet Law Enforcement Program

This program is designed to foster respect for law enforcement, patriotism, and responsible citizenship among high school students who have completed their junior year. Participants must be in good academic standing, possess high moral character and have the desire to learn more about the law-enforcement profession. American Legion departments are encouraged to sponsor Youth Cadet Law Enforcement programs in cooperation with their state police or highway patrols.

High School Oratorical Scholarship Program – "A Constitutional Speech Contest"

The American Legion Oratorical Contest develops among high school students a deeper knowledge and understanding of the U.S. Constitution. The contest has two phases: prepared orations of eight to 10 minutes and an assigned topic presentation of three to five minutes. Department-level contests are usually held January through March. The national competition is conducted over a weekend in April in Indianapolis. Scholarships totaling $138,000 are awarded to winners at the national level. Additional scholarships may also be awarded at other levels of competition.

Junior Shooting Sports Program

The American Legion's Junior Shooting Sports Program is a national activity administered through American Legion-affiliated clubs organized to provide gun safety and marksmanship training for young people. Recognized by shooting sports groups as one of the country's premier amateur shooting programs, Junior Shooting Sports attracts more than 1,400 young people per year to compete for berths in the national competition, culminating at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo. Any recognized youth group with responsible adult leadership may participate, but the group must be affiliated with an American Legion post.

American Legion Eagle Scout of the Year

The American Legion, which has supported Scouting since 1919, sponsors 2,300 units serving more than 61,500 young people nationwide. The organization annually sponsors a national scholarship awarded to the Scout selected as The American Legion's Eagle Scout of the Year." The winner receives a $10,000 scholarship. Additional scholarships of $2,500 each are awarded to three runners-up.

American Legion Child Welfare Foundation

The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, Inc., (CWF) has awarded more than $16 million in grants for the betterment of children since its founding in 1954. The mission of the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation is to contribute to the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual welfare of children and youth by awarding grants supporting beneficial research, studies, surveys, projects, programs and other initiatives.

CWF has provided funds to help educate the public about such topics as Huntington's disease, juvenile diabetes, shaken baby syndrome, autism, meningitis, Marfan syndrome and court-appointed advocates. The American Legion covers overhead costs for the foundation, so 100 percent of CWF contributions go directly to help children.

Contributions may be sent to the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206.

AMERICANISM, CHILDREN & YOUTH

Children & Youth Month

The American Legion observes Children & Youth Month each year in April. The national theme is "Children … our most precious natural resource." Programs fall into the following categories: children's health, child safety and family support.

National Family Week

For years, The American Legion has, by mandate, advocated passage of federal legislation designating the week of Thanksgiving as National Family Week. The American Legion continues to support such legislation and, in the meantime, conducts its own observances of National Family Week.

Flag Education

Flag education has been a major program of The American Legion since its founding. Each year, posts distribute literature about proper flag display and respect to schools and groups. The American Legion also offers "For Which It Stands," an instructional DVD for school flag-education programs throughout the United States.

School Award Medal Program

The American Legion School Award Medal Program recognizes courage, honor, leadership, patriotism, scholarship and service among deserving students.

*For more information, email **americanism@legion.org**.*

AMERICAN LEGION LEGACY SCHOLARSHIP

The American Legion assists families of U.S. military personnel who have died or became disabled while serving on active duty on or after Sept. 11, 2001, by providing college scholarships for their children. The program expanded in 2017 to include scholarships for students whose post-9/11 veteran parents have been assigned a 50 percent or greater combined disability rating by VA.

The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund was established by the National Executive Committee in October 2001. Since the fund's inception, more than 366 scholarships have been awarded, generating tens of thousands of dollars for students. The American Legion Legacy Run is a major contributor to the fund, often raising more than $1 million a year.

Efforts are underway to encourage contributions from Legion Family members, corporations and others to help the fund reach $20 million, which would allow it to be fully self-sustaining.

As an unfortunate consequence of war, many children of active-duty U.S. military personnel are now members of single-parent families. The total survivor benefits provided by the federal government are not enough to pay tuition and other costs at even the most affordable colleges. The gap widens when considering future costs, and many students resort to student loans and long-term debt after college. Similar difficulties are faced by the children of veterans who are disabled due to military service.

Legion Family contributors and the general public may send donations to the American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund, P.O. Box 361626, Indianapolis, IN 46236. Donations may also be made at ***legion.org/donate*** and through contributions to American Legion Charities.

For more information, email ***scholarships@legion.org****.*

BLUE STAR & GOLD STAR BANNERS

Service banners are symbols of sacrifice, and Blue Star and Gold Star Banners – reintroduced by The American Legion nationwide as the global war on terrorism began – recognize families of the deployed and survivors of U.S. military personnel who made the supreme sacrifice. A blue star on a field of white with red border is displayed in windows of homes during war periods, each star representing one family member in harm's way. Gold stars are similarly displayed by the families of servicemen and women who lost their lives on duty.

Service banners date back to World War I. The Blue Star Banner was designed and patented in 1917 by Army Capt. Robert L. Queissner of the 5th Ohio Infantry, who had two sons serving on the front lines.

It quickly became the unofficial symbol of having a child in the service. As the number of fatalities increased, gold stars were substituted and stitched onto banners, completely covering the blue stars.

During World War II, the War Department issued specifications on the manufacture of the banner as well as guidelines indicating when, and by whom, the service flag could be flown.

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, The American Legion passed Resolution 107 at the 83rd National Convention, reinstating the Blue Star Service Banner program. American Legion posts are encouraged to distribute a banner to each family in its community with a relative serving.

Service banners are available from Emblem Sales by calling toll-free, **(888) 453-4466**. Specify item No. 825.101 for Blue Star Banners, 825.101G for Gold Star Banners and 825.101D for Gold Star Deluxe Banners. As Legionnaires, we encourage military families to display the banners in recognition of the sacrifices being made by their loved ones.

*For more information, email **emblem@legion.org**.*

MEMBERSHIP

The American Legion's ability to influence decision-makers in Washington, help veterans get their VA benefits and serve as valuable mentors to young people depends on membership. It is essential to grow membership to fulfill the organization's positions, programs and services at every level.

During The American Legion's centennial, the national Membership & Post Activities Committee launched a strategic plan to stimulate a "culture of growth" at every level. Membership plans are now underway at the national, department, district, county and post levels, built around five priorities:

1. Brand awareness

2. Communication

3. Training, education and leadership development

4. Post creation, development and revitalization

5. Recruitment and retention

With passage of the LEGION Act, anyone who has served honorably on active duty since Dec. 7, 1941, is eligible to join The American Legion. Those currently serving on active duty or having been activated in the National Guard or reserves are eligible as well. Basic training can be a qualifier membership as long as it was performed under Title 10 orders.

Together, we can meet our membership goals through several methods, including:

Going door to door, seeking veterans who never joined The American Legion or those who let their memberships lapse. Eye-to-eye contact is the most effective way to connect with potential and existing members. The national commander has made it a goal for the organization to recruit 100,000 new members this year. Using MyLegion.org, membership teams can get lists of current members in at-large membership status and those with lapsed memberships to make personal contact.

Developing new posts. American Legion-eligible veterans may wish to charter new posts in their communities. Steps to apply for charters are available at **legion.org/membership**. Some American Legion members prefer to meet at churches, restaurants, hotels or other locations, aware that brick-and-mortar post homes are not a requirement for an effective post.

Revitalizing posts and districts. Revitalization efforts include community outreach events and membership campaigns in local areas. National staff assistance can be requested through departments.

Reconnecting with the military. Outreach from The American Legion to the military is essential. Encourage post members to acquaint themselves with those still serving and introduce them to such American Legion programs as Temporary Financial Assistance, Operation Comfort Warriors and the National Emergency Fund, which demonstrate The American Legion's support for those in uniform and communities in need.

The American Legion Family. Made up of more than 2,250 chapters and more than 121,000 members, The American Legion Riders are growing in popularity, as is Sons of The American Legion, which is currently the largest veteran support organization in the world. Coupled with the American Legion Auxiliary, the entire American Legion Family can work together to increase membership for each post, unit, squadron and chapter. Wives, male spouses, daughters, mothers, sisters and granddaughters can join the American Legion Auxiliary; sons or grandsons of Legion-eligible veterans can join Sons of The American Legion. Legionnaires and Legion Family members can also join the American Legion Riders.

*For more information, email **membership@legion.org**.*

NATIONAL EMERGENCY FUND

Disaster relief has been a part of The American Legion's identity since the early 1920s, when it entered a formalized agreement with the Red Cross to provide volunteer help and raise money in times of catastrophe.

Known as The American Legion's Disaster Relief Program, it worked in conjunction with the Red Cross for about 50 years. Over that time, The American Legion, through local posts, assisted disaster victims with housing, food, supplies and cleanup.

After Hurricane Camille struck the Gulf Coast in 1969, the National Executive Committee created the National Emergency Fund (NEF) as a one-time initiative to better assist American Legion Family members and posts, with immediate funds of up to $1,500 for individuals, and up to $5,000 for posts.

In 1989, when Hurricane Hugo pummeled South Carolina, the NEF was revived. It continues to assist Legion Family members recovering from natural disasters. Grants of up to $3,000 each are awarded to eligible individuals, with up to $10,000 for posts.

Since the NEF's inception, nearly $9 million has been provided in direct financial assistance to American Legion and SAL members, as well as posts. All

contributions are deposited in a special account and used exclusively to meet a member's most urgent needs. Not one donated dollar is used for fundraising or administrative costs. The NEF has kept damaged posts from closing and helped American Legion and SAL members rebuild their lives after disasters.

Funds are provided as grants, not loans, and offer assistance to current members for out-of-pocket expenses like temporary housing, food and clothing in devastated areas. The funds are not designed for insurance compensation or to cover monetary losses from a business, nonresidential structures on property (like barns or sheds), equipment or vehicles.

Disbursement amounts are decided on a case-by-case basis. Applications are available at department headquarters or online at **legion.org/nef**. Your department adjutant can provide further details.

With the massive destruction caused by Hurricane Dorian and flooding in Texas due to Tropical Storm Imelda in 2019, donations are needed more than ever before. Tax-deductible donations to the NEF can be made at **legion.org/donate**. Learn more about the program at **legion.org/nef**.

*For more information, email **ia@legion.org**.*

OPERATION COMFORT WARRIORS

Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW) is a program dedicated to meeting the needs of wounded, injured or ill men and women in military and veterans hospitals, wounded warrior battalions and transition units, and individuals transitioning back to their communities from these medical facilities. OCW provides comfort items and recreational experiences not usually supplied by the government, and helps assist wounded, injured or ill veterans transition from military to civilian life.

Operation Comfort Warriors puts to good use donations that help patients at military and veterans hospitals and warrior transition units. Funds purchase items that assist in rehabilitation or provide recreation or socialization experiences during recovery.

OCW donations have included loose-fitting sweatsuits for those suffering from burns, recreational outings to amusement parks and sports equipment for adaptive therapy programs. OCW also provides larger items, such as ping pong tables, electronic dartboards, kayaks and other items for use by wounded warriors.

Operation Landstuhl – from which OCW evolved – was created by Past National Commander Paul Morin to raise funds for troops hospitalized at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. In

2008, then-National Commander David K. Rehbein expanded the effort to purchase items for troops at all U.S. military hospitals and transition units. Operation Landstuhl and OCW have raised millions to purchase comfort items for troops worldwide. The program has received national acclaim, but more importantly, it shows recovering military personnel and veterans what The American Legion is and does.

Since 9/11, tens of thousands of U.S. troops have been injured, sickened and hospitalized. From fitness equipment for troops recovering at Fort Jackson, S.C., to electronics for Marines at Camp Pendleton, Calif., and every place in between, OCW is The American Legion's way of thanking those who have defended our nation.

OCW is successful because of the many individuals, American Legion posts, American Legion Auxiliary units and Sons of The American Legion squadrons that have raised funds and donated to the program. Visit ***legion.org/ocw*** for the latest OCW news.

You can donate online or by mailing a check to Operation Comfort Warriors, The American Legion, P.O. Box 361626, Indianapolis, IN 46236.

For more information, email ***ocw@legion.org****.*

SONS OF THE AMERICAN LEGION

All direct male descendants – sons, grandsons, great-grandsons of Legionnaires or of those deceased veterans who served after Dec. 7, 1941, are eligible to join the Sons of The American Legion. SAL started in 1937 and has become the nation's largest veteran support program, as well as the strongest program of The American Legion. There are more than 371,000 members in more than 6,140 squadrons attached to posts nationwide. SAL has enjoyed 21 consecutive years of growth.

At the local level, SAL members support veterans, veteran families and youth in their communities through 1.9 million volunteer hours a year. A big

component of SAL activity is fundraising. Last year, the program welcomed donations of more than $1.8 million supporting veterans and their families, $2.1 million supporting children and youth, and $3.4 million supporting Americanism programs. SAL's leading charity is the Child Welfare Foundation, for which it raises more than $400,000 annually.

In combination with all components of the American Legion Family, SAL can be a crucial part of the success of a local post, offering those who may not have served in the military opportunities to participate and support veterans.

*For more information, email **sal@legion.org**.*

TEMPORARY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The American Legion's Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) program provides cash grants to help meet the basic needs of veterans and military personnel with minor children at home when no other resources are available. As the name implies, the grants are for temporary relief only.

Since its establishment in 1925, The American Legion Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) program has awarded cash grants to minor children of current active-duty personnel or American Legion members. Active-duty applicants can be considered without being a member of The American Legion. These one-time, non-repayable grants help families in need meet the cost of shelter, food, utilities and health expenses, thereby keeping a child or children in a stable environment during financial hardships. Through TFA, The American Legion sends a message that it does not turn its back on the children of America's veterans during times of personal difficulty.

A landmark program created by The American Legion's Endowment Fund, TFA was established as a form of direct aid to minor children of veterans. Through TFA, a post can call upon the national organization to lend a helping hand for maintenance or medical needs.

In 2019, The American Legion awarded more than $1 million in TFA grants to Coast Guard families who had their pay interrupted during the longest government budget shutdown in history.

No applicant is considered eligible for Temporary Financial Assistance until complete vetting is done at the post or department level. A legitimate family need must be determined, and all other available assistance resources must have been utilized or exhausted. Additionally, the TFA application must

originate and be filled out by someone at the local level. To apply for a grant, one must contact a local American Legion post. It is the responsibility of the American Legion post or department involved to make every effort to secure assistance for the children from its own resources, or from other organizations or agencies within the community. TFA provides a safety net when all other means have been tried.

Payments from the program may be made to, or on behalf of, the family to pay a variety of expenses necessary to maintain the health and welfare of the children involved.

Maintenance grants may not be used for debt incurred prior to the date of application, unless the debts are utility or shelter expenses. They may be used for:

- Food
- Shelter – rent or mortgage payment
- Utilities
- Clothing

Medical grants must be approved prior to any debt being incurred. These grants may be used for:

- Medical care
- Surgery
- Dental care
- Pharmaceuticals
- Dietary needs
- Hospitalization
- Nursing and convalescent care

*For more information, email **americanism@legion.org**.*

TROOP SUPPORT

The American Legion ardently supports active-duty servicemembers, National Guard troops and reserve components. With forces still deployed in support of the global war on terrorism, placing heavy demands on the National Guard and reserves, continued support is essential.

Legionnaires can demonstrate their support for those in uniform in many ways, including:

- Encouraging lawmakers to improve the quality life and increase the pay for America's servicemembers. Let them know we back their missions regardless of where our troops are serving.
- Volunteering to serve in the Legion's Family Support Network (FSN), which assists military families with lawn mowing, grocery shopping, home repairs and other needs while their loved ones are deployed or training. For more information, email ***familysupport@legion.org***.
- Offering time or donating money to the Legion's Operation Comfort Warriors program, which provides comfort items to wounded, injured or ill servicemembers recovering in military and veterans

hospitals. It also assists severely wounded veterans as they transition from these medical facilities or from the military back to their communities. Send donations to Operation Comfort Warriors, The American Legion, P.O. Box 361626, Indianapolis, IN 46236 or contribute online at ***legion.org/ocw***.

- Donating Blue Star and Gold Star banners for military families to display in their windows.
- Hiring veterans. Transitioning servicemembers can learn about job fairs online at ***legion.org/careers/jobfairs***, or by contacting the Veterans Employment & Education Division at **(202) 861-2700** or ***vee@legion.org***.
- Honoring military families or new veterans with "Welcome Home" or "Troop Appreciation" celebrations.
- Sending cards or care packages to deployed servicemembers, or visiting wounded personnel in hospitals. Sometimes a simple "thank you" makes a big difference to those serving America.

*Visit **legion.org** to learn more.*

THE AMERICAN LEGION

P.O. Box 1055
Indianapolis, IN 46206
(317) 630-1200

legion.org

Follow The American Legion online:
legion.org/facebook
twitter.com/AmericanLegion

Stock# 58-016 Artwork# 92PR1019