AMERICANISM

2016-2017

MESSAGE POINTS

Issue – CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO PROTECT THE FLAG OF THE UNITED STATES

Message Points:

- The American Legion has campaigned diligently for the passage of an amendment to the Constitution of the United States to protect the symbol of our Nation, the Flag of the United States, from physical desecration.

- Part of that campaign has included the founding of The Citizens Flag Alliance, Inc., a coalition of civic, veteran, business and fraternal organizations which have come together to persuade Congress to propose a flag amendment.

- The legislatures of all 50 states have indicated by memorial resolutions to the U.S. Congress that such an amendment to the U.S. Constitution is needed in view of the 1989 decision of the United States Supreme Court (Texas v. Johnson) that invalidated all flag protection laws.

- Surveys have consistently shown that over 80% of the American people support the passage of a flag amendment.

- Flag protection amendments have passed the House of Representatives six times previously, only to fall short of the necessary two-thirds supermajority required in the Senate.

- Since the time of the American Revolution millions of men and women have proudly defended our country under the “Stars & Stripes” and, as a last gesture of gratitude, this emblem of our country is placed upon the coffin of veterans as a token of respect for service rendered to a grateful nation.

- The American Legion will continue to urge the Congress of the United States to propose and approve an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would allow the Congress to prohibit the physical desecration of the Flag of the United States.

- The American Legion will continue its efforts through affiliation with The Citizens Flag Alliance, Inc., to bring to a successful conclusion the grassroots campaign to amend the Constitution of the United States of America in order to return to the people their right to protect the Flag from acts of physical desecration.

Americanism (317) 630-1203
October, 2016

Issue – OPPOSES POLICY OF PROHIBITING THE PLACEMENT OF AMERICAN FLAGS ON INDIVIDUAL VETERAN'S GRAVES IN NATIONAL CEMETERIES

Message Points:

- The American Legion, an organization of wartime veterans, has an ongoing position to oppose attempts that would prohibit the placement of flags on individual graves. This was made clear in 1978 at the National Convention in New Orleans when delegates passed Resolution 498 titled “Oppose Any Plan to Stop the Decoration of Individual Graves in any National Cemetery” and by Resolution 214, National Convention 1997 at the National Convention in Orlando entitled “Oppose Policy of Prohibiting the Placement of American Flags on Individual Graves in National Cemeteries.”

- President Abraham Lincoln, in 1862, signed legislation creating the national cemeteries and through the years it has been traditional and customary to decorate the individual graves with the U.S. Flag. The flag represents the country for which they served and by displaying the National Symbol, the country expresses a degree of appreciation to that veteran; that it remembers his or her service.

- The American Legion believes it is wrong that some national cemeteries have adopted policies prohibiting the placement of the flags while, at the same time, allowing floral and other items to be placed on the gravesites.

- National Cemeteries are symbolically “American Cathedrals” where the living respect the memories and service of the veterans and family members interred therein. There is no more fitting remembrance of veterans and their service to this country than the U.S. Flag.

Issue – ENGLISH AS THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Message Points:

- The American Legion strongly urges Congress and State Legislatures to designate English as the official language of government in the United States. As of 2015, thirty-one states have adopted English as their official language of government. (Source: www.proenglish.org)

- The American Legion believes naturalized citizens should have the ability to speak and understand the English language. It also believes bilingual programs and ballots printed in another language are counterproductive, costly and tend to discourage immigrants from entering the mainstream of American life.

- The American Legion urges Congress to encourage and fund alternative bilingual education programs to serve, as was originally intended, as a short intermediate step to achieve a proficiency in the English language. Bilingual education programs that provide primary instruction in the student's native language relegates English to secondary status.

- The American Legion believes all election ballots should be printed in the English language.

- The American Legion believes that the promotion of another language over English in the United States contributes to separatism rather than unification of purpose. It believes that legislation designating English as the official language of this country would help unify the different cultures and facilitate the learning of English by immigrants.

- The American Legion adopted its first formal resolution calling for English as the official language at a national convention in 1983. A follow-up resolution, adopted in 1994, made reference to the belief that “the English language is undergoing gradual displacement in this era of high immigration.”

- The American Legion recognizes the desire of immigrants to maintain a cultural link with their native country by speaking their native language. This is understandable and appropriate when the individual also possesses a proficiency in the English language at a level conducive to normal conversation. The American Legion encourages immigrants to achieve a proficiency in multiple languages.

- Ninety-four percent of the world’s countries (189 of 202) have at least one official language. English is an official language in 53 nations (26 percent). The United States is one of the only 13 nations that does not have an official language policy. (Source: www.proenglish.org)

Issue – BACKGROUND CHECKS

Message Points

- In the aftermath of several high-profile allegations of child sexual molestation across the United States demonstrating the importance for ensuring protection of the youth participants in The American Legion's youth programs, procedures were successfully implemented in 2013 for the background screening of volunteers selected to staff national tournaments of American Legion Baseball, The American Legion Boys Nation, The American Legion National Oratorical Contest, The American Legion National Junior Shooting Competition, and National Boy Scout Jamborees. (NEC Resolution 4, May 2012).

- Mandatory background screening of coaches, managers, and volunteer staff of Junior and Senior American Legion Baseball teams was also successfully implemented in 2013. (NEC Resolution 16, October 2012)

- Departments of The American Legion are also encouraged to institute background screening procedures for volunteers supporting youth programs conducted within their departments as offered in the resolution titled "Background Screening Procedures and Policies For American Legion Youth Program Volunteers" (NEC Resolution 12, May 2012).

- Through numerous resolutions over the years The American Legion has advocated for guarding against child neglect and abuse.

Issue – GET OUT THE VOTE (GOTV)

Message Points

- The American Legion urges all eligible citizens to register and to vote in all elections at all levels, including federal, state and local elections.

- As a 501 (c) (19) organization, The American Legion can engage in political activities but must avoid partisan politics.

- Permissible activities for 501 (c) (19) organization include:

    - Conducting voter registration & nonpartisan GOTV campaigns; educating the public on issues and encourage participation.
    - Educating all candidates and political parties on issues or positions of the organization.
    - Hosting or participating in a nonpartisan candidate forum. All candidates must receive the same invitation to participate when hosting a forum.
    - Making presentations on the Legion's positions on issues to platform committees, campaign staff, candidates, media and the general public.
    - Working on behalf of any germane ballot measures.
    - Continuing normal lobbying on issues germane to the organization.

- Activities **not permissible** for 501 (c) (19) organization include:

    - Endorsing or opposing a candidate for public office.
    - Coordinating activities with a candidate.
    - Making contributions (money, time or facilities) to a candidate.
    - Managing, funding or organizing a Political Action Committee.

- When conducting candidate forums and debates, it is recommended that the emblem and post colors be removed to avoid any impression of endorsement of a particular candidate.

- Volunteers working on a Legion-sponsored registration and voting drives should not wear campaign buttons/stickers or communicate their personal views about candidates, parties and issues. This does not mean that members are forbidden to show partisanship. Legionnaires may express partisan views, but they must do so without wearing the Legion cap or other Legion attire and without a direct connection to an American Legion post.

Issue – PATRIOTIC HOLIDAYS

Message Points:

- The majority of Americans view Memorial Day as a time for relaxation and leisure recreation rather than as a solemn occasion and a time to reflect and pay tribute to the American servicemen and women who sacrificed their lives in defense of our Nation. This has occurred due, in part, to the changing of traditional holiday dates to create "three-day weekends."

- The American Legion believes that the time-honored traditional observances of these holidays have eroded because of the changes in dates and commercialization of the holidays. The American Legion believes that the importance of these holidays warrants their observance on the traditional dates.

- The American Legion encourages Congress to restore the official observance of Lincoln's Birthday to February 12, Washington's Birthday to February 22, Memorial Day to May 30 and Columbus Day to October 12 each year.

- The American Legion urges the passage of federal legislation that would result in an annual Presidential proclamation calling on all American institutions, public and private, to toll their bells for one minute, beginning at 11 a.m. on May 30, in remembrance of the servicemen and women who died defending our Nation and our freedom.

- **"National Moment of Remembrance"**: The American Legion supports a "National Moment of Remembrance" and encourages all Americans to pause for a moment of silence at 3 PM (local time) on the federally observed date of Memorial Day to remember those who died in service to their country.

- **Armed Forces Day**: The American Legion supports the annual observance of "Armed Forces Day" in support of the role of this country's armed forces and to acknowledge the service of those who serve in them.

- **VJ Day**: The American Legion urges our government to not be influenced by the Japanese or intimidated by them to delete the term "VJ Day" from our vocabulary.

- **Veterans Day**: The American Legion encourages the nation's schools to conduct Veterans Day observances on or near November 11 each year. The American Legion has pledged to assist in this activity by providing speakers for such observances. It also opposes any and all efforts that would designate Veterans Day on any day other than the traditional November 11th date.

Issue – SCHOOL PRAYER

Message Points:

- The American Legion believes Congress should take steps to correct problems resulting from court rulings that have prohibited “prescribed” prayer in schools. A Constitutional Amendment to permit voluntary school prayer is an alternative warranting consideration.

- The American Legion believes in a person's right to use the Holy Scriptures in public places, over the air waves and while traveling in space.

- The American Legion also believes it should be the right of every human being to publicly express his faith in God and the Holy Scriptures without fear of reprisal from the government or any other power.

- U.S. Supreme Court decisions in the early 1960's have severely restricted the practice of public prayer even though those decisions simply addressed prescribed or compulsory prayer and not prayer of a ”voluntary” nature.

- The U.S. Supreme Court in 1985 rendered a decision that cited an Alabama law which authorized one minute of silence in public schools for “meditation or voluntary prayer” as being unconstitutional. In 1992, in **Lee vs. Weisman**, the Supreme Court affirmed, 5-4, a clear separation between church and state by ruling that it is unconstitutional to allow prayers as part of a public school graduation ceremony.

- Through the years since the Supreme Court rulings, numerous measures have been introduced in the Congress that were intended to express the sense of Congress for a period of silence in public schools; or which seek a Constitutional Amendment to allow voluntary school prayer.

- The American Legion has always placed one's belief in a Supreme Being as paramount to a healthy nation. It is reflected in the first clause of the Preamble to The American Legion's Constitution that reads "For God and Country....”

Issue – THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER

Message Points:

- **The Star Spangled Banner** became our National Anthem on March 3, 1931, when President Herbert Hoover signed Public Law 823.

- The American Legion believes that many millions of Americans cherish and respect the currently accepted version, both words and music, of **The Star Spangled Banner**, our National Anthem. This traditional version was first used in 1918 as the "Service Version" by the War Department for use in Army and Navy song books.

- Many Americans have been offended by disrespectful and unconventional playing and singing of the National Anthem at sporting events. The American Legion encourages the playing of the National Anthem in its original customary and traditional rendition.

- Some celebrities and public figures have voiced their opinions that **The Star Spangled Banner** should be replaced with **America, the Beautiful, God Bless America** or another song. The American Legion opposes any changes in the words and music of the National Anthem as adopted under Public Law 823 of the 71st Congress.

- The American Legion urges radio and television networks and stations to desist from pre-empting with commercial advertisements the singing and playing of our National Anthem and the raising and/or lowering of our Flag.

- The American Legion believes **The Star Spangled Banner** should be performed in the English Language.

Issue – THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION

Message Points:

- The American Legion's members pledge their unwavering support for the United States Constitution when they recite the Preamble to the Legion's Constitution prior to organization meetings and gatherings. The American Legion was formed as an organization to uphold and defend the U.S. Constitution in a manner not unlike those who defended the Constitution by paying the supreme sacrifice, with their lives.

- The American Legion is particularly vigilant in opposing attempts to dilute the rights outlined in the First Amendment. The following is the official position of The American Legion in regards to free speech in the United States:

  (a) The right of free speech is essential to keep a people free. A people cannot long remain free if they cannot fairly object to the conduct of those they have themselves placed in authority. This guarantees freedom not only to the ones who agree with us, but also to the ones who disagree with us. Such is the proud constitutional heritage of America.

  (b) But, like all other rights, the right of free speech must be exercised in a civilized community with due regard to the rest of the community. A right granted by the people for their own protection creates no right to destroy the people. Hence, free speech must not incite to violence and crime or to corrupt the public morale. Reasonable limitations to this end are lawful as protection to freedom of speech.

  (c) The American Legion remedy to end violations of the right of free speech is not the use of lawful force, but the use of lawful methods. Complaint should be made to the duly constituted authorities; and if one is lawfully deputized, such authorities may be directly aided.

  (d) The American Legion remedy to overcome the preaching of unwise doctrine, though in a lawful manner, is not unlawful suppression of the preaching, but education in wise doctrine. Wisdom in the end will always overcome folly, and meanwhile an orderly society will be preserved.

- The American Legion believes that the weakening of any one individual right guaranteed by the Bill of Rights weakens all rights guaranteed by the document and when individual rights are gone, then all rights reside with the government.

Issue – PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Message Points:

- The American Legion supports the Pledge of Allegiance in its current form and is adamantly opposed to any and all attempts to revise it beyond the version that was approved by the Congress of the United States in 1954.

- The American Legion is opposed to the ruling by certain liberal federal judges who have declared the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance in our nation's schools to be unconstitutional because of its references to God.

- The American Legion, in 1983, spearheaded a national effort to teach and encourage all U.S. citizens to recite the Pledge of Allegiance correctly. The campaign also called on Legionnaires to introduce the necessary information into the public schools and to other youth groups to ensure that future generations of Americans are able to recite the Pledge of Allegiance correctly.

- Both Houses of Congress begin their sessions by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. It is customary in the opening of public meetings to also recite the pledge, particularly on Flag Day, June 14, as part of a national show of respect to Old Glory.

- The American Legion is recognized as one of the foremost authorities on proper display, care and respect for the United States Flag. The American Legion, along with more than 140 other organizations, are involved in a campaign led by the Citizens Flag Alliance, Inc. to give Congress the authority to protect the flag from acts of physical desecration.

Issue – SUPPORTS THE PLACEMENT OF UNITED STATES FLAGS IN SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

Message Points:

- The American Legion, an organization of wartime veterans, has an ongoing position to encourage the placement of United States Flags in school classrooms. Resolution 23, National Executive Committee October 2003, titled “Display Of The Flag Of The United States in School Classrooms” encourages The American Legion, at all levels, to support efforts to display the Flag of the United States in the nation’s school classrooms.

- The American Legion believes that at an early age, children should begin to develop an appreciation for the Nation and for what the Flag of the United States represents. Respect for the Flag of the United States is a foundation upon which to build an understanding of the sacrifices made by the Nation’s forefathers and veterans.

- Many classrooms in the United States do not display the Flag of the United States and do not participate in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

- Many state governments have legislation mandating the display of the Flag of the United States in school classrooms.

- The American Legion has produced "For Which It Stands,” a DVD which includes an animated feature explaining the meaning behind the Pledge of Allegiance, information about the history of the flag of the United States, the significance and meaning of our flag, and respecting and caring for our flag.

Issue – AMERICA'S RELIGIOUS HISTORY AND HERITAGE THREATENED

Message Points:

- Our Flag, our Pledge of Allegiance, our Boy Scouts, our veterans' memorials, our religious history and heritage, our American values – all are under attack by activists. The courts are awarding the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) millions of dollars in taxpayer-paid "attorney fee awards" authorized under the Civil Rights Act, 42 U.S. Code Section 1988.

- The American public generally does not know the ACLU is profiting in such cases as follows:

  (a) A Federal Court in Riverside, California allowed the ACLU to pursue a precedent-setting lawsuit to remove a solitary cross from the Mojave Desert Veterans Memorial. ACLU attorneys were awarded $63,000 for this case.

  (b) The ACLU reaped some $940,000 in settlement from the City of San Diego when it surrendered in ACLU's litigation to kick the Boy Scouts out of Balboa Park. The Boy Scouts are appealing. The American Legion has filed a friend-of-the-court brief supporting the Scouts.

  (c) The ACLU received some $500,000 to drive the Ten Commandments out of the courthouse of Alabama's Judge Roy Moore, notwithstanding the fact that the same Ten Commandments are on the massive doors and the wall of the U.S. Supreme Court itself.

  (d) Portland Public Schools were ordered to pay the ACLU $108,000 in a case brought for an atheist who objected to the Boys Scouts being allowed to recruit during non-class time. In addition, the school district spent $232,000 defending this suit. At the time of this writing, Portland is considering a complete ban.

  (e) The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors surrendered on a 3-2 vote to the ACLU's demands that it change the county seal because of a tiny cross in one small panel representing the mission period of its history. The ACLU, exposing its hypocrisy as well as fanaticism, did not demand removal of the central religious figure dominating the seal – "Pomona," the Italo-Roman goddess of *poma*, i.e. fruits. A citizens' initiative petition is ongoing to place the issue on the ballot and overturn the surrender to the ACLU.

  (f) The city council of Redlands, California reluctantly surrendered to the ACLU's demand that it change its city seal to remove a cross, for fear of court-ordered attorney fees to the ACLU.

(g) In July 2015, a long fight over the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals' ruling that a 29-foot cross erected by a Vietnam-era veteran in honor of a friend killed in action, was unconstitutional due to its location on public land, was settled when the U.S. Government sold the property to the Mount Soledad Association. That sale allowed the monument to become part of private property.

(h) The U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland ruled on November 30, 2015 that though the Bladensburg World War I Veterans Memorial, which takes the shape of a cross, is on public grounds, it does not violate the provisions of the First Amendment as its purpose is not primarily religious. As a result of the court decision, the monument may remain in its current location without alteration.

- While the law was written with good intentions – to ensure legitimate victims of civil-rights violations could obtain representation – it has been exploited by the ACLU in First Amendment "establishment of religion clause" cases. In these cases, there are, in fact, no attorney fees incurred by the ACLU or its plaintiffs, who appear to be "mascot plaintiffs" with *de minimis* claims. ACLU profits from these cases at taxpayer expense.

- Elected and appointed officials at the local, state and federal levels have literally backed away from standing up to the ACLU in fear of enormous attorney fees being imposed by unelected judges not answerable to the American taxpayer.

Issue – THE AMERICAN LEGION LEGACY SCHOLARSHIP

Message Points:

- The American Legion established the American Legion Legacy Scholarship in honor of those service men and women who died in the September 11 terrorist attacks on America. The scholarship was founded to benefit the children of military personnel who die on or after September 11, 2001, (Post-9/11) while serving on active duty. These deaths do not have to be combat related or have taken place overseas.

- In 2017, the scholarship expanded its eligibility to include those children of Post-9/11 veterans assigned a Veterans Affairs (VA) disability rating of 50% or greater. This category of veterans' children was found to be the least supported by federal and state education benefits programs.

- Children of fallen Post-9/11 veterans continue receive first priority in issuing scholarship awards.

- It is a needs-based scholarship with funds awarded in one-year increments up to six times. The amount of individual awards may be as much as $20,000 per annum. The amount of funds available to award each year will be drawn from 50% of donations and 50% of interest earned on the trust during the previous calendar year. Allotted funds not awarded will be returned to the corpus of the fund.

- The remaining 50% of donations and 50% of interest earned is invested into the corpus of the fund to continue active growth.

- America's "total force" military is comprised of active duty military, Guard and Reserve Units from across the Nation. According to Department of Defense statistics, over fifty percent of service men and women are married and many have children.

- Department of Defense figures reveal that, on average since 2001, over 1,500 members of our active duty Armed Forces have died each year. Just as sure as military service is a high-risk profession, there will be families who can benefit from our efforts to provide educational opportunities for these children.

- The American Legion Legacy Trust Fund is a 501(c)3 public charity as defined by IRS code.

- Tax-deductible donations may be sent to: The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund, The American Legion, P.O. Box 361626, Indianapolis, Indiana, 46236. The Employer Identification Number (EIN) for The American Legion Legacy Trust Fund is 42-1553035.

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Issue – AMERICAN LEGION BASEBALL WORLD SERIES

Message Points:

- Resolution 14, National Executive Committee, May 2012, designated Shelby, North Carolina as the permanent site for The American Legion Baseball World Series (ALBWS).

- Fans set the attendance record for the sixth straight year at the ALBWS with approximately 120,000 paid attendees in 2016. Attendance has increased 40% since the ALBWS moved to Shelby in 2011.

- The 2016 ALBWS featured six games broadcast nationally on ESPNU, with the addition of three Sunday games to go along with the semifinals and championship. Over 300,000 people watched the broadcasts over the three days. The first nine games of the tournament were featured online via ESPN3.

- American Legion Baseball received over one million impressions on social media over the course of the 2016 national tournament. The American Legion Baseball website had just shy of one million hits in August.

- Since 1925, American Legion Baseball has taught hundreds of thousands of young Americans the importance of sportsmanship, good health and active citizenship.

- In 2015 over 67,000 players participated in American Legion baseball with over 3,700 teams having registered.

- American Legion Baseball graduates have gone on to great things after leaving the program. In addition to the countless number of players who have gone on to play collegiate and professional baseball, a total of 68 graduates been inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. Hall of Famers include Johnny Bench, Ryne Sandberg, Wade Boggs, Whitey Herzog, Yogi Berra, and Reggie Jackson. Current stars such as Albert Pujols, Alex Gordon and Bryce Harper also played American Legion Baseball.

Issue – OPERATION COMFORT WARRIORS

Message Points:

- Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW) is a program dedicated to meeting the needs of wounded, injured, and ill military personnel by providing recreational, rehabilitative/ therapeutic and comfort items not usually provided by the government.

- OCW also provides wounded warriors items that offer some entertainment and distraction and possibly some enjoyment during their recovery. OCW also provides outings such as dinners, sporting events and trips to amusement parks for the service person and their family. Family is always invited to join their service member as part of the event.

- 100% of all donations go to the program. All overhead costs related to administration and marketing of the program are paid by the general fund of The American Legion.

- OCW serves wounded warriors in federal DoD and VA medical facilities, clinics and hospitals, and wounded warrior regiments, battalions and units, and soldier and family assistance centers.

- Since the program was created in 2006 more than $2.8 million dollars has been raised. OCW is part of The American Legion Charities and is a 501(c)3.

- OCW continues to provide assistance to wounded warriors across the nation with individual grants. OCW is successful because of the many individuals, American Legion posts, American Legion Auxiliary units, and Sons of The American Legion squadrons have helped raise funds and participate in the events.

- Tax-deductable donations can be mailed to: Operation Comfort Warriors, The American Legion, P.O. Box 361656, Indianapolis, Indiana, 46236

BLUE STAR SERVICE BANNERS FACT SHEET

- The Blue Star Service Banner was designed, and patented in 1917 by World War I Army Capt. Robert L. Queissner of the 5th Ohio Infantry who had two sons serving on the front line. It quickly became the unofficial symbol of a child in the service.

- On Sept. 24, 1917, an Ohio congressman read the following into the Congressional Record: "…The mayor of Cleveland, the Chamber of Commerce and the governor of Ohio have adopted this service flag. The world should know of those who give so much for liberty. The dearest thing in all the world to a father and mother - their children."

- During World War II, the Department of War issued specifications on the manufacture of the flag, as well as guidelines indicating when and by whom the Service flag could be flown or the Service Lapel button could be worn. The Department of Defense updated the guidelines on December 1, 1967 with DoD Directive 1348.1, which implemented an Act of Congress authorizing a service flag and a service lapel button (U.S.C. 179-182).

- The Blue Star Service Banner typically displayed in windows is an 8.5 by 14-inch white field with a blue star(s) sewn onto a red banner. The size may vary but should be in proportion to the size of the U.S. Flag.

- Today Blue Star Service Banners are displayed by families who have a loved one serving in the armed forces, including the National Guard and Reserves of all military branches. The banner displayed in the front window of a home shows a family's pride in their loved one serving in the military and reminds others that preserving America's freedom demands much.

- The blue star represents one family member serving in the armed forces. A banner can have up to five stars, signifying that five members of that family are currently in military uniform on active duty.

- If the individual symbolized is killed or dies while serving, the star representing that individual will have superimposed on it a gold star of smaller size so that the blue forms a border. On flags displaying multiple stars, including gold stars, when the flags are suspended as against a wall, the gold star(s) will be to the right of, or above the blue star(s), a place of honor nearest the staff.

- Blue Star Mothers and Gold Star Mothers organizations were established during World War I and remain active today.

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- Blue Star Service Banners, while widely used across America during World Wars I and II, were not embraced during the Korean or Vietnam wars with nearly the same enthusiasm.

- The American Legion is rekindling the spirit of pride in our military men and women following the horrific terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The American Legion is providing banners to families in communities across the nation. Free color downloads are available at www.legion.org of the banners and static cling versions for home and automobile, as well as lapel pins, are available from The American Legion Flag & Emblem Sales.

- The American Legion also has a special Blue Star Banner Corporate Flag for government and corporate America to show their support for employees called to active duty in the war against terrorism.

CHILDREN & YOUTH

2016-2017

MESSAGE POINTS

Issue - NATIONAL FAMILY WEEK

Message points

- One of the guiding principles of The American Legion Children & Youth program is to maintain the integrity of the family home. As the most basic unit in our society, the family must be strengthened against the negative pressures pushing against it every day.

- In order to have the means to survive, two-income families are the norm rather than the exception in today's economy.

- The numbers for divorced families, blended families and single-parent families have reached all-time highs and more teenagers than ever now hold part-time jobs.

- Children are now being placed in day care centers at a much earlier age and young children are home alone after school (latch key) until a parent returns home.

- Our family week program suggests ways for better family interaction and requests that Congress designate a permanent annual observance of National Family Week during the traditional Thanksgiving holiday week.

Issue - JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

Message Points

- The American Legion continues to be concerned about violent crimes committed by juveniles.

- Juveniles account for approximately twenty-four percent of our population and account for 12.6 percent of violent crimes (murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault) as reported by the 2010 FBI Uniform Crime Reports.

- Numerous government-supported institutions nationwide, specifically schools and housing, are still experiencing serious, violent acts of crime and criminal damage.

- Any instance of crime or violence in a school not only affects the individuals involved, but may also disrupt the educational process and affect bystanders, the school itself and the surrounding community.

- Every child has the right to attend a school that is safe and secure, conducive to learning and free of fear.

- The American Legion recommends that school boards and national and state education agencies, in conjunction with parents and community members, develop and implement programs that create violence prevention strategies, to include consistent, fair and responsible “zero tolerance” polices.

- Local law enforcement is urged to implement programs designed to reduce juvenile delinquency in coordination with the Department of Education, community citizenry and other agencies within the criminal justice system.

- Posts continue to urge and assist those in the educational community and criminal justice system to work closely together with communities and families to reduce juvenile delinquency in schools and our communities.

Issue - IMMUNIZATION

Message points

- The American Legion has recognized the need for immunizations being available for all children for many years.

- Medical advances in vaccines have eliminated many serious diseases over the past several years. As a result, many parents neglect to immunize their children because of a false belief that there is no longer a danger present, or they cannot afford the cost of the shots.

- Most school systems now make it mandatory for children to be immunized before enrolling in school, as many diseases are reappearing in larger numbers because of this apathy toward necessary inoculations.

- The American Legion supports the continued funding of federal programs available to provide free immunizations to those families which are not able to pay so all children can be protected from disease.

Issue - YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION

Message Points

- Youth suicide is a serious problem across the United States and The American Legion was one of the first organizations to bring the problem to the attention of communities through our Posts and volunteers.

- Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among 10-14 year olds and the third leading cause of death for those ages 15-24.

- Eleven people between ages 15 and 24 kill themselves every day, accounting for over 4,000 deaths per year.

- The American Legion provides the brochure “Warning Signs” that can be used to educate children and adults on what to look for and what can be done to prevent this senseless tragedy.

Issue - CHILD MALTREATMENT

Message Points

- The American Legion has been concerned about child maltreatment from the very beginning of our organization. Our major emphasis has always been the education of adults who come in contact with children to recognize the signs of physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect.

- Teachers, coaches, administrators and others responsible for children while they are away from their parents should familiarize themselves with the warning signs of all forms of child maltreatment and, when necessary, report any suspected maltreatment to the proper authorities and ensure that these children are referred to the appropriate child protective service in their community.

- All laws and penalties relating to child abuse and neglect should be reviewed to determine if they are adequate, based on current model programs as determined by their state.

- The American Legion continues, at all levels, to educate the public of their obligations and duties with respect to reporting suspected cases of child maltreatment.

- Departments and posts should cooperate in all ways possible with organizations and agencies that advocate for child maltreatment prevention, and promote and increase the public's awareness of child maltreatment and its detrimental effects on the children and youth of our society.

Issue - DRUGS AND NARCOTICS

Message Points

- Illegal trafficking of drugs into the United States is one of the greatest threats to the welfare and safety of our citizens, particularly our youth.

- Illegal drugs have an enormous negative impact on the youth of our society in more ways than just physical health. Once “hooked,” the individual often commits crimes to obtain money to pay for their addiction.

- According to current studies, alcohol abuse by teenagers is the number one drug problem in America with increased use of marijuana and other drugs right behind it.

- We oppose any legislation that lowers the drinking age or would legalize the use or sale of marijuana or other hallucinatory drugs.

- The American Legion has been involved with the issue of drug abuse, to include alcohol abuse, since the early 1960’s. Our materials are prevention-oriented. We are assisting posts in developing drug-education programs in their communities, which encourages children to achieve their highest potential by living a drug-free lifestyle.

Issue - CHILD PORNOGRAPHY & OTHER OBSCENE LITERATURE

Message Points

- Since the early 1960's, The American Legion has taken a stand against the production, sale or distribution of pornographic materials that involve children.

- Pornography has invaded our neighborhoods at increasing rates; methods to combat the trafficking of this obscenity should be explored by government agencies to include the Post Office, FBI, and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

- Investigation is necessary by all concerned to ensure that adequate legislation is in place in each state to prohibit the production, sale or distribution of this obscenity and to also insure that tough penalties exist and are enforced on those that violate these laws.

- The American Legion opposes any legislation that eases present laws against pornographic material in their production, sale or distribution or reduces any existing penalties that would be enforced.

Issue - CHILD ABDUCTION/MISSING CHILDREN

Message Points

- Each day in the United States, an average of 2,185 children, 17 years and younger, are reported missing or disappear by abduction, run away, or are lost to some unknown cause.

- The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) was created in 1984 as a central resource and data clearinghouse for law enforcement, victims and their families, fighting for safe recovery of missing children and the protection of all children from sexual exploitation.

- Due to the tireless work of NCMEC and law enforcement, today more children come home safely that at any time in our nation's history; law enforcement is better prepared and families are more alert and aware than ever before.

- Although NCMEC has made a significant impact in tackling this daunting problem, there is much that remains to be done, for too many children still do not make it home, and too many are still victims of sexual predators.

- The American Legion urges the President and Congress to provide adequate annual funding for the continued operation and expansion of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, America's best resource to combat the national crisis of child victimization.

- Departments and posts seek to increase the public's awareness of child victimization and its detrimental effects on the children and youth of our society and cooperate with credible organizations and agencies that seek to locate missing children in their states and communities.

- The American Legion supports the America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response (AMBER) and the national AMBER Alert Network Act of 2003 to help missing children to be returned to their homes.

Issue - CATASTROPHIC ILLNESS AMONG CHILDREN

Message points

- A catastrophic illness is any illness or condition, acute or chronic, for which expenses are incurred that are not fully covered by a private insurer, federal or state health care assistance, or other financial source.

- Many children are not receiving needed medical treatment because their families have been unable to afford the cost of catastrophic illness. While many of these families have hospitalization insurance – even major medical – they cannot meet the cost of a major illness.

- Several states have enacted legislation to establish Catastrophic Illness in Children Relief Funds to help families bear the excessive financial burdens associated with the care of children with special health needs and disabilities.

- These funds have proven effective and are designed to act as a safety net for families from all walks of life who have excessive expenses related to a child's medical needs.

- The American Legion urges the federal government to enact legislation to financially assist families faced by the catastrophic illness of one of their children, thus preserving the family's financial integrity and their ability to cope with the responsibilities that accompany significant health problems in children.

- The American Legion, through department and post leadership, urges state governments to enact legislation including, but not limited to, state specific Catastrophic Illness in Children Relief Funds, to assist financially those individual families faced by the catastrophic illness of a child in order to maintain the integrity of the family.

Issue - PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM THE UNRESTRICTED MEDIA

- Computer usage statistic shows that 90% of children in the United States have access to a computer in their home and 93% with access also have Internet access.

- Children, especially teens, are more likely to encounter sexual conversations and materials on the Internet, according to a congressional study. One in five youths online face invitations to engage in cybersex or receive other risqué solicitations.

- The study also found that one in four children encounter pornographic pictures while researching homework topics or checking their e-mail.

- The producers of our nation's movies, TV shows and TV news and the Internet have become very explicit in describing and depicting various types of violence as well.

- The American Legion supports appropriate state and federal legislation to restrict the excessive use of violence, vulgarity and other forms of moral depravation in movies, TV programs, TV news and the Internet.

- Departments and posts of The American Legion conduct awareness campaigns to educate their members, their families and the general public about the potential dangers the Internet and other forms of electronic media pose to children and teenagers.

Issue – SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

Message points

- The sexual victimization of children is overwhelming in magnitude, yet largely unrecognized and underreported.

- Statistics show that one in five girls and one in ten boys are sexually exploited before they reach adulthood, yet less than 35 percent of those child sexual assaults are reported to authorities.

- According to *Highlights of the Youth Internet Safety Survey* conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice "one in five children (10 to 17 years old) receives unwanted sexual solicitations online."

- By far the most prevalent exploitive act reported is the production and distribution of pornographic images of children.

- The impact of these terrible acts can devastate families and put children at risk of depression, disassociation and post-traumatic stress – symptoms that can last well into adulthood.

- The American Legion supports appropriate state and federal legislation aimed at the prevention, investigation and prosecution of child sexual exploitation.

- Departments and posts seek to raise community awareness about the prevalence of sexual exploitation of children and cooperate with law enforcement agencies, government entities and public/private organizations that seek to empower the public to take immediate and direct action to enforce a zero-tolerance policy regarding child sexual exploitation.

Issue – CHILD CARE SERVICES

Message points

- The American Legion is deeply concerned about the quality of life issues surrounding our children and youth.

- According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there are approximately 21 million infants, toddlers and preschool children under the age of six in the United States, with more than 8.8 million of these children in childcare.

- A 2005 study by the Florida State University Center for Prevention & Early Intervention Policy found that high-quality child care can accelerate children's social, emotional, cognitive and verbal development.

- Consistent studies have found that childcare at most centers in the United States is poor to mediocre; childcare licensing standards, designed to assure minimal standards for health and safety, vary widely from state to state.

- Departments and posts seek to cooperate with the state and community public or private agencies with day care responsibilities to the end that licensed childcare facilities will be available to all children in our nation.

- Departments and posts seek to encourage the adoption and implementation of safe and consistent licensing standards for childcare in facilities throughout this nation.

- Departments and posts assist in raising the level of understanding among the general public about the needs of adequate childcare; they seek to encourage the public to commit more resources to achieve a level of quality that is necessary for children to grow in a healthy and safe environment.

Issue – CHILD SAFETY

Message points

- According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, unintentional injury remains the leading cause of death and disability among children ages 14 and under in the United States.

- Every day, more than 39,000 children are injured seriously enough to require medical treatment, totaling more than 14 million children each year.

- The top causes of unintentional injury-related deaths and disabilities among children and adolescents are: automobile accidents, drowning, fire, falls and poisoning.

- Based on the specific needs of individual communities, a combination of factors – education, environmental improvements, engineering modifications, enactment and enforcement of legislation and regulations, economic incentives, community empowerment and program evaluation – have proven effective in reducing the incidence and severity of unintentional death and disability.

- The American Legion supports appropriate federal and state legislation aimed at preventing or reducing unintentional injury among children and adolescents.

- Departments and posts seek to provide leadership on organized safety commissions and actively promote child safety at the state and local levels.

Issue – FIREWORKS SAFETY

Message points

- Hospital emergency rooms in the United States treat nearly 10,000 fireworks-related injuries each year, with 45 percent of these injuries occurring among children under the age of 15.

- Fireworks can result in severe burns, fractures, lifetime disfigurement or death.

- Every type of legally available consumer “safe and sane” fireworks has been associated with serious injury or death.

- Fireworks typically cause more fires in the United States on the Fourth of July than all other causes of fire combined on that day, resulting in direct property damage in excess of $25 million annually.

- Departments and posts are assisting to alert, inform and educate parents, children, community leaders and others, about the dangers of fireworks.

- Departments and posts encourage children and their families to enjoy fireworks at public fireworks displays conducted by professionals, rather than purchase fireworks for home or private use.

CITIZENS FLAG ALLIANCE

2016-2017

MESSAGE POINTS

Issue: FLAG PROTECTION AMENDMENT

Full language of the proposed amendment: ***"The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States."***

Message Points:

- By judicial decree in 1989, the U.S. Supreme Court amended the United States Constitution by "inserting" flag burning into the Bill of Rights. That decision took from the American people a fundamental right that had been exercised from our beginnings as a Nation – the right to protect our flag.

- The American flag is a national treasure. It's our one unifying symbol of national unity. Traditionally and legally it had been protected from desecration, and most Americans think that protection should be restored. In fact, all fifty states have asked Congress to pass the amendment and send it to the states to be ratified.

- Protection of our flag from physical desecration impairs no one's free speech. It does not prevent a single idea from being expressed. It involves no censorship of an idea. The amendment would prohibit conduct with respect to one unique object, the Flag of the United States.

- Opponents often ask, "What's a flag?" Congress, for the purpose of a law, agreed in 1989 that the term "flag of the United States" means any flag of the US, or any part of one, of any substance, of any size in a form commonly displayed. That should make it clear that we aren't talking about ties, or bikinis, or birthday cakes with representations of the flag on them. No one would place a tie, or bikini or birthday cake on the coffin of a veteran.

- The Constitution is too important to be left to the Courts and so is the flag. They both belong to the people and it is time to let the people decide, through the process of ratification, if their flag is worthy of protection.

- Opponents of the amendment have led many to believe that the amendment, alone, will ban flag desecration. It will not. It would only allow Congress to write a law that, like any law, would be subject to debate, required to be voted on by both houses of Congress, and subject to veto by the President.

- In 1994 The American Legion founded creation of a nonprofit organization known as the Citizens Flag Alliance, Inc., a coalition still active today of over 140 member organizations representing millions of Americans, for the purpose of lobbying and campaigning for grassroots support of persuading Congress to pass a constitutional amendment to return to the American people the right to protect their flag.

Issue: American Legion Riders

Message Points:

- The American Legion Riders (ALR) is a dynamic national program administered by the departments and posts in each of the 50 states as well as in several oversea areas.
- The ALR was first established as a local post program in 1993 at Post 396, Garden City, Michigan, and has since grown to over 2,000 post-affiliated chapters worldwide in 2017.
- The ALR is not a motorcycle club, but rather an association of like-minded Legion Family members who enjoy family activities and the opportunity to advance the aims and goals of The American Legion.
- The national ALR membership is estimated to be over 100,000 Riders, all of whom are current members of The American Legion Family.
- ALR membership has continued to grow rapidly, attracting many new American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, and Sons of The American Legion members—a truly "family" centered organization.
- In 2005, the Mulvane, Kansas ALR founded The Patriot Guard, a national movement which since its beginning has honored and protected military funerals.
- The American Legion Riders across the country have helped to raise over $12.2 million dollars for The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund since its inception in 2002.
- The American Legion Legacy Run, www.legion.org/riders/legacyrun, the country's largest cross country, multi-day motorcycle touring event, helps raise over $1M annually for the American Legion Legacy Scholarship.
- Riders also raise and donate hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to countless national, state, and local programs and charities for veterans, military families, and communities.
- Riders now also actively ride and raise funds for Operation Comfort Warriors (www.legion.org/ocw), providing for comfort items and assistance for our recovering wounded at military bases and transition battalions all over the country.
- The American Legion Riders attract active duty military members as well as veterans from all war eras as far back as WWII. Active-duty members are also eligible to join - and they are joining. Many active duty military installations conduct motorcycle safety training programs in which American Legion Riders play an important part.
- Riders promote the honorable nature of military service, providing honor guards and flag lines to local military funerals, patriotic parades and other memorial events each year.

The American Legion Riders today are important part of the Legion family in support of virtually all programs of The American Legion.

Internal Affairs/ALR/whs
October 2016

Issue: SONS OF THE AMERICAN LEGON (SAL)

Message Points:

- The Sons of The American Legion was established as a non-political, non-sectarian civilian organization at the 14th National Convention of The American Legion in Portland, Oregon, September 12-15, 1932.

- The Sons of The American Legion is a program of The American Legion with over 6,113 Sons of The American Legion Squadrons located throughout the United States, France, and the Philippines with a total membership of over 365,000 plus members.

- The major goal of the Sons of The American Legion is support to our nation's veterans and their families as well as support to The American Legion.

- The Sons of The American Legion has adopted by resolution to support The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation and since 1987, the year of adoption, the Sons have made donations well over 7 million dollars.

- The Sons of The American Legion annually contributes over 1.6 million dollars in cash and goods to our nation's veterans in VA Home and Medical facilities and over 455,000 volunteer hours.

- The Sons of The American Legion program is a key component to the Legion family in support of The American Legion and all veterans.

Issue: VALUE OF MEMBERSHIP

Message Points:

- The American Legion is comprised of 55 state-level "departments" in each of the 50 states as well as the District of Columbia, France, Mexico, Philippines and Puerto Rico. There are approximately 13,000 local "posts" throughout the state level.

- The 2016 current national membership is roughly 2 million.

- In 2016, our online renewal process was again well received by the membership and produced better than expected results.

- The American Legion extended its service in communities across the country through the development and revitalization of close to 2,300 posts in 2015.

- One of the fastest growing activities in The American Legion is the Legion Riders. They raised more than 1.2 million dollars for the 2014 Legacy Run, from Indianapolis to Baltimore in support of The American Legion Legacy Fund—a fund which provide scholarships to the children of active duty troops who died while serving in the military since September 11, 2001.

- The American Legion attracts younger veterans. Active-duty members are eligible to join - and they are joining. In fact, The American Legion has over 500,000 members who joined under the War on Terrorism, Persian Gulf, Lebanon/Grenada and Panama War periods of eligibility. Today's active duty service members continue to join.

- The American Legion is "Still Serving America." This is only a part of what The American Legion posts did "for God and Country" in program year 2014-2015.

    1. Donated more than 3.7 million hours of service to communities.

    2. Post Service Officers handled more than 181,129 cases of veterans seeking benefits and just compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

    3. Devoted over 867,000 hours of volunteer service to Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals.

    4. Donated more than 80,000 pints of blood to collection centers nationwide, making The American Legion the nation's single largest blood donor.

    5. Annually contributes nearly $40 million on programs benefiting children and youth.

6. Awarded more than 8,000 medals to Junior ROTC Students.

7. Sponsored almost 19,000 American Legion Boys State delegates.

8. Sponsored more than 2,500 Scouting units serving more than 64,000 youngsters.

9. Sponsored more than 2,000 American Legion Baseball teams and an additional 1,500 youth baseball squads.

10. Awarded more than $4 million in college scholarships to deserving students.

Issue: NATIONAL EMERGENCY FUND

Message Points:

- Total grants given to American Legion family members in 2015 totaled just under $37,700. As of late September 2016, we have given out just over $67,595 in grants with donations totaling over $500,000.

- Fund is designed to assist our members who have been displaced or evacuated from their primary home due to damages sustained by a declared natural disaster.

- Grant monies are given to assist with out-of-pocket expenses incurred as are result of their displacement. Items covered include, but are not limited to, housing, food, gas, clothing and various and sundry items needed to sustain the family.

- Every dollar donated to the fund is used for the express purpose of rendering financial assistance to American Legion, Sons of The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary members and posts.

- The total amount of grant monies awarded since the NEF was reinstated in 1989 is more than $8.5 million.

- We continue to receive checks and electronic transfers on a weekly basis from our departments, districts, posts, squadrons and individuals.

- What makes the NEF program so unique is that our members know they can turn to The American Legion for immediate financial assistance without repayment requirements normally associated with other federal and state agencies.

- Our true story of “Mutual Helpfulness” is at work in the time of need.

Issue: NATIONAL DEFENSE BUDGET

The House of Representatives voted 342-85 and the U.S. Senate voted 72-26 to adopt the short-term spending bill and avoid a government shutdown resulting in keeping the U.S. government operating from October 1, 2016, the start of the new fiscal year, until December 9, 2016 when Congress will attempt to approve a spending bill that will last longer than the current 2 month continuing resolution. Among chief concerns of the Honorable Eric Fanning, who was sworn in May 18, 2016 as the 22nd Secretary of the Army, is the budget and the demand for Soldier's around the world. He is already focused on providing soldiers and their families with more predictability amid increasing demands on the force and ongoing budget constraints. "The main challenge with the budget is the instability of it, the unpredictability of it," Fanning said. "We start every year with a continuing resolution and the threat of a government shutdown. We've got sequestration looming on the horizon." If BCA (Budget Control Act) caps (also known as sequestration) remain, we can no longer execute the defense strategic guidance.

- Not only do the spending cuts downsize the force structure, but also reduce service members pay and benefits, which decreases Soldier Readiness and could potentially lead to the loss of highly trained men and women

- While the Department of Defense is content on shrinking the size and scope of the United States military, our major adversaries, Russia and China, along with rouge nations such as North Korea and Iran are ramping up their military stocks and capabilities.

- The American Legion urges Congress to oppose the pending budget cuts in military spending and oppose the reduction of force proposed by the Department of Defense.

- The American Legion's message to Congress is not to allow our military forces to reach a weakened state in these uncertain and perilous times.

Issue: POW/MIA POLICIES

Under the direction of the Secretary of Defense and per the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) passed by Congress, the Department of Defense (DoD) formally created one agency responsible for the recovery and accounting of missing service members from past conflicts. The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency was established on January 30, 2015 to more effectively increase the number of missing service personnel accounted for from past conflicts and ensure timely and accurate information is communicated to their families.

This agency brings together the former Defense Prisoner of War Missing Personnel Office (DPMO), the Joint Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Accounting Command (JPAC), and the Life Sciences Equipment Laboratory (LSEL). Consolidating the Department's personnel accounting assets will lead to better oversight of family resources and services, research, and operations. The agency will enable the workforce to achieve the fullest possible accounting for our missing personnel, better anticipate family needs, and adapt to changes in the DoD and the United States Government. The agency will also honor our veterans' sacrifices and confirm an obligation made to those serving our country.

- The American Legion believes U.S. Government POW/MIA operations are achieving substantial progress. The American Legion urges the President and Congress to support legislation and policies that will use all reasonable resources to achieve the fullest possible accounting of all missing American service members and designated civilians regardless of location or era of loss.

- The American Legion calls upon Congress to provide full funding, personnel, and any other resources for all members of the Department of Defense (DOD) POW/MIA accounting community, and to ensure these funds not be redirected by the DOD for any other purpose.

- The American Legion calls upon the President and Congress to continue to declassify all POW/MIA information (except that revealing intelligence sources or methods) in a form readily available to the affected families and public review.

- The American Legion calls upon Congress to establish a joint standing congressional committee on POW/MIA affairs to ensure continued priority action by the executive branch in addressing the POW/MIA issue.

- The American Legion calls upon the President and Congress to initiate or strengthen joint commissions with Russia, the People's Republic of China, and Democratic People's Republic of Korea to increase POW/MIA accounting and recovery efforts.

- The American Legion calls upon the President and Congress to take further favorable actions toward the Socialist Republic of Vietnam as Hanoi increases efforts to provide the fullest possible accounting for US personnel still missing in Vietnam or in areas of Laos and Cambodia it controlled during the Vietnam War.

- That "fullest possible accounting" is defined as turning over live prisoners, repatriating remains of those killed in action or who died in captivity, or providing convincing evidence when neither is possible.

Issue: MILITARY QUALITY OF LIFE STANDARDS

The American Legion has always supported quality of life features for members of the Armed Forces, their dependents, military retirees, and survivors as people are the foundation of our Nation's fighting forces. Without highly qualified, dedicated men and women, even the most sophisticated weaponry will not provide the deterrent force necessary for this nation to remain at peace. Military compensation is only one factor in the quality of life equation as to whether good service members and their families remain in military service: Other major factors include fair treatment, career stability, regular promotions, adequate quarters, adequate health care, commissaries, and day care facilities, all of which ease the numerous sacrifices that are demanded of service member. The American Legion urges Congress and the Department of Defense to support and fund quality of life features including, but not limited to, the following:

- military pay comparability for the Armed Forces and regular increases in the Basic Allowances for Housing (BAH); renovation and construction of military quarters and increased funding for child day care centers and pay raises must be competitive with the private sector; adequate medical, mental, and dental health services; also improve funding to support morale, welfare, and recreational facilities;

- non-privatized exchanges and commissary facilities, and the Defense Commissary Agency (DECA) and its functions should be retained and not relegated to the military services; preserving an attractive retirement system for the active and reserve components;

- oppose any changes to the military retirement system, whether prospective or retroactive, that would violate contracts made with military retirees and that would undermine morale and readiness;

- requiring the Services perform mandatory physical examinations, without waivers, for all separating and retiring servicemembers within 90 days of separation from service; full funding concurrent receipt of military retirement pay, and VA disability compensation as well as Special Compensation pays for disabled military retirees; that the Survivor Benefit Plan/Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (SBP/DIC) offset be eliminated;

- TRICARE for Life and the TRICARE Senior Pharmacy program for Medicare-eligible military retirees, their dependents and military survivors, should be adequately funded; regular cost-of-living adjustments to military retirement and increased death gratuity payments; and

- whenever a Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) is conducted, certain base facilities such as base medical facilities, commissaries, exchanges and other facilities be preserved for use by active duty, reserve forces personnel, military retired veterans and their families.

Issue: IDENTIFYING NATIONAL INTERESTS BEFORE COMMITTING MILITARY FORCES AND ASSETS

The United States Constitution clearly defines the duties and responsibilities of the branches of government relating to defense of the nation. There is no greater responsibility of a government than to protect its population and infrastructure. The War Powers Resolution of 1973 requires the President to advise the Congress and American people what national security interest is served by committing U.S. forces to combat in a sovereign nation. The United States is currently under significant economic and budgetary constraints which has the potential to negatively impact the ability of the military to protect the nation. It has been shown repeatedly an uninformed and uninvolved public will quickly lose confidence and deny support for military operations they do not understand.

- The American Legion supports the War Powers Resolution of 1973 (50 U.S.C.1541-1548).

- The American Legion, in keeping with its founding principle of a strong national security, calls on the President of the United States, in compliance with the War Powers Resolution of 1973, to inform the American people and Congress of the critical national interests served by committing U.S. armed forces or military assets to hostile action.

- Before committing military forces and assets to hostile action, specific goals, overwhelming force levels necessary to accomplish the goals, parameters identifying when the specific goals are met, and realistic costs in national treasure must be identified and articulated to the American people and the Congress.

- The American Legion defines hostile action as any action where the use of lethal force is authorized, imminent, or implied to accomplish a military objective within the borders of a sovereign foreign nation.

- The American Legion encourages Congress to once again establish itself as the oversight mechanism as prescribed in the Constitution of the United States in Article 1 Section 8, "The Powers of Congress."

Issue: MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY STANDARDS

Secretary of Defense Ash Carter announced beginning in January 2016, all military occupations and positions will be open to women, without exception. For the first time in U.S. military history, the secretary said women will be able to contribute to the Defense Department mission with no barriers at all in their way as long as they qualify. Even more importantly, the military services will be better able to harness the skills and perspectives that talented women have to offer. With this new integration, there are valid concerns about the physical demands required of soldiers to qualify and service in the combat arms: Army and Marine Corps infantry, armor, artillery, Army Special Forces and Navy Seals.

- The American Legion strongly believes that the Department of Defense and all branches of the military services must maintain the current physical and mental requirements and qualifications for acceptance into military service that have created the best and most respected military in the world.

- The American Legion also believes that the mental and physical qualifications of all military personnel, regardless of gender or age, should be held to a single duty position specific standard depending on Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) and not be amended without Congressional authority.

- The American Legion requests the Congress of the United States to hold extensive and in-depth hearings on Military Leadership Diversity Commission Recommendation 9 eliminating the "Combat Exclusion Policies for Women," and the DOD's Review of Laws, Policies and Regulations Restricting the Service of Female Members in the U.S. Armed Forces since Congress and only Congress can codify the elimination of the "combat exclusion clause for women."

- The American Legion believes that without such Congressional hearings and oversight there exists the distinct possibility that changes will be made to lessen the current standards or set a double standard, one for men and one for women, for the sake of accommodating personnel for "social experiments," therefore, reducing our nation's military effectiveness.

Issue: FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The Members of The American Legion, as veterans of wartime service in the defense of liberty, have a special concern for maintaining peace with freedom and recognize that a strong U.S. foreign policy is vital in that regard. The official concern of The American Legion stems from that part of the Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion which states: "We associate ourselves together … to make right the master of might; to promote peace and goodwill on earth; to safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy."

The American Legion believes that the following objectives should be incorporated into U.S. foreign policy in order to maintain peace with freedom while preserving and promoting democracy:

- Recognition that the U.S. has great and multiple responsibilities as a leader of the Free World.
- Dedication to achievement of world peace with freedom, secured by a peace through strength posture.
- Support for a global fight on multiple fronts to end the scourge of terrorism.
- Support for democracy and human rights in other countries when such is consistent with U.S. national interests and national power.
- Participation in essential collective security alliances, provided our allies contribute their fair share.
- Negotiation of equitable, verifiable arms control agreements, which improve U.S. national security.
- Opposition to the spread of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons or long- range ballistic missiles which may be used by terrorists, terrorist organizations, communists or aggressor nations.
- Determined opposition to international terrorism and drug trafficking.
- Support for responsible international organizations that are consistent with U.S. sovereignty and serve U.S. national interests.
- Participation in an increasingly interdependent Free World trading system based on fair and equitable trading practices.
- Recognition that the President must be the chief architect of U.S. foreign policy as envisioned in the U.S. Constitution, while Congress performs important functions of advice, oversight and funding.
- Support for the appropriate resources to promote and protect U.S. vital national interests world-wide.

Issue: ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION POLICY

Immigration and Customs Enforcement estimates that there are 11.5 million illegal immigrants who currently reside within the U.S. The Department of Homeland Security, Office of Audits stated that each year more than one million aliens attempt to illegally enter the United States without proper documentation or enter legally and violate the provisions of their visa. Aggressively tracking foreign nationals is a deterrent to terrorist activities and failing to effectively utilize the available systems and technology to track illegal aliens threatens the security and future of the U.S.

- That The American Legion urges Congress to adopt an immigration reform policy which emphasizes border security against those individuals attempting to enter this country illegally and internal tracking of all resident aliens and illegal immigrants.

- The American Legion opposes legislation that would result in the granting of amnesty and legal residency, in any form or by any name, to illegal immigrants currently in the United States.

- The American Legion encourages the federal government to provide the needed resources to enforcement agencies tasked with curtailing illegal immigration in this country and encourage the Congress of the United States to mandate that the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Student and Exchange Visitor Information System continue and be aggressively administered by the responsible agency of the federal government.

- The American Legion encourages the Congress of the United States to provide agencies of the federal government with the necessary resources to track the arrival and departure of foreign nationals to the United States.

- The American Legion encourages a thorough background check and interview for each candidate for a U.S. visa prior to issuing said visa.

- The American Legion encourages Congress to authorize and fund the securing of the borders and points of entry in the United States by: construction of physical barriers; hiring a sufficient number of U.S. Border Patrol Agents; federalization of National Guard troops to assist border security operations; searching all vessel and their cargo arriving at our seaports; enforcement of existing laws and passing of new laws to reduce the illegal immigrant population; and the funding of the Department of Homeland Security to ensure its effectiveness in securing borders of the United States.

Issue: MILITARY COMMISSARIES

The Defense Commissary (DeCA) is an agency of the United States Department of Defense (DoD) that operates more than 245 commissaries worldwide. Commissary privileges help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve our country. Without commissary savings, pay compensation for active duty and military retirees would be less competitive with the civilian sector. Retired as well as drilling Reservists and National Guardsmen are now authorized to use the commissaries and their access should not be restricted.

Any effort to reduce or dismantle the integrity of the military commissary system would be seen as a serious breach of faith with a benefit system that currently serves as a mainstay for the active and reserve components, military retirees and military survivors, military personnel involuntarily discharged or released from active duty, and 100 percent service-connected disabled veterans and others.

- The American Legion urges the Department of Defense and Congress to continue full funding of the military commissary system and to retain this vital non-pay compensation benefit system which is essential to the morale and readiness of the dedicated men and women who have served, and continue to serve, the national security interests of the United States.

- The American Legion opposes any efforts to institute “variable pricing” or to privatize the military commissary system or to reduce discounts or to dismantle or downsize the Defense Commissary Agency.

Issue: DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE MILITARY RETIREMENT SYSTEM

The July 2011 Defense Business Board study recommended significant changes in the current military retirement system. Many of these same recommendations were made by the 1978 Presidential Commission on Military Compensation.

The 1978 report from the Congressional Budget Office addresses the significant risk to maintaining a viable volunteer force if dramatic changes to the current system are made.

In the attempt to slow the growth in military personnel costs, The Department of Defense 2013 Budget Request calls for the creation of an independent commission to study the military retirement system.

The Murray-Ryan Bill and the Bipartisan Budget Act 2013 were passed with the devastating cut to Military COLA included, though no input was received from the Department of Defense or the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC).

On February 12, 2014, under tremendous pressure from the military community, Congress overwhelmingly voted 95-3 to repeal the COLA cut for all military members who joined prior to January 1, 2014 and President Obama signed the repeal into law.

On January 29, 2015 the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission submitted to the President and the Congress of the United States the recommendations to modernize the Uniformed Services compensation and retirement system. Requirement for Implementation Plan: The Fiscal Year 2016 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA FY2016) (Public Law 114-92), section 635, requires the Secretaries of the Uniformed Services to submit to the congressional defense committees the plans to implement a modernized retirement system effective January 1, 2018. This report is submitted by the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) in fulfillment of the requirement on behalf of and with the full participation of the Uniformed Services.

On March 25, 2015, The American Legion gave testimony before the Subcommittee on Military Personnel, Committee on Armed Services, United States House of Representatives which states, “The American Legion does not support this (MCRMC’s Modifying the Military Retirement Plan) proposal; there are too many questions about the implementation and concerns about how service members would be affected; however given that approximately four out of five (81 percent) service members do not serve the full 20 years in the military, it is worth examining possible solutions and measures which could provide some retirement benefits to those service members who depart from military service before the ‘20 year cliff.’”

- Any changes to the existing military retirement system may violate contracts made with military retirees and currently serving military personnel, and would undermine morale and readiness.

- The American Legion opposes any changes to the current military retirement system which reduces the incentive for enlistment or re-enlistment.

Issue: OPPOSE TRICARE FEE INCREASES

The American Legion recognizes the debt owed to the entire military retirement community for their sacrifices and hardships endured in honorable military service to this nation. Administration and defense leaders are seeking to impose very large health care fee increases on military retirees and their families. The proposed fee increases are inappropriate and out of line with career servicemembers' unique sacrifices. Military medical and retirement benefits must be markedly better than civilian benefits because they are primary offsets for decades of extraordinarily arduous service conditions. Military retirees' careers entailed unique and arduous service conditions few other Americans are willing to endure for 20 or 30 years including hazardous duty, service in foreign countries, often in hostile environments, extended family separations, just to mention a few. The Pentagon's next budget is likely to contain instituting enrollment fees for TRICARE for Life. The current fiscal realities dictate certain financial concessions may have to be made by our citizens but to unfairly burden America's military retiree families any further is unconscionable.

- Those who point to the disparity in cost between civilian and military health insurance, and hint at unfairness, simply do not appreciate the huge premiums already paid by the selfless service and sacrifice of our servicemembers and their families.

- The American Legion sees this proposal as an erosion of quality of life earned benefits from a grateful nation for honorable military service.

- The American Legion is strongly opposed to proposed hikes in premiums and or enrollment fees being paid by enrollees in the military's health insurance program known as TRICARE.

- The American Legion urges Congress to decisively reject unjust proposed increases in the military retirees' TRICARE enrollment fees, deductibles, or premiums.

Issue: OPPOSE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

The American Legion views nuclear weapons development and proliferation a critical threat to national security. Allowing Iran to develop or acquire a nuclear weapon would destabilize the entire Middle East and pose an eminent threat to Israel. The Iran Nuclear Deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is an non-binding executive agreement which was signed in Vienna on July 14, 2015 between Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council: China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States, and Germany (also known as the P5+1) along with the European Union that allows Iran to retain its nuclear infrastructure.

- Under the JCPOA, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors will be faced with a stipulated 24-day notification and appeal period when requesting access to Iran's military facilities, undeclared sites or suspected sites—thereby possibly allowing Iran to hide, remove or transport nuclear-weapon materials and operations.

- Not all verification and monitoring mechanisms are defined in the JCPOA; important verification and monitoring mechanisms have been defined in agreements made solely between the IAEA and Iran separate and apart from the JCPOA and these same verification and monitoring agreements remain undisclosed to Congress or the Administration for review.

- Diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Iran were extinguished in 1980 and therefore U.S. citizens are prohibited from being on the IAEA inspection team in Iran.

- The JCPOA removes a United Nations embargo prohibiting conventional weapons exports to Iran in five years and ballistic missile technology in eight years; ending the conventional-weapons embargo would permit Russia to sell ballistic missiles to Iran which have the capability to reach Israel and overseas targets.

- By lifting U.S. and international sanctions in accordance with the JCPOA, an estimated $100 billion dollars will be released to Iran which may be used to fund terrorism against Americans, American interests and allies.

- The American Legion urges Congress not to lift any sanctions in connection JCPOA until such agreement is amended by including all verification and monitoring mechanisms as well as including a provision stipulating unconditional access to every aspect of Iran's nuclear program—whether declared or undeclared—to inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency and that these amendments are ultimately agreed to in a timely manner by Iran and the P5+1.

- The American Legion believes the United States of America should be prepared to exercise all options, up to and including military action, in the interest of preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

V&R Message Points

Issue: THE MAJORITY OF VETERANS DO NOT SUPPORT PRIVAZITIZING THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

- Two years ago, a scandal over VHA employees' data manipulation to cover up long appointment scheduling delays made headlines and left the veterans' health care system reeling. Congress established the Commission on Care to conduct a comprehensive review of the VA health care system to look more expansively at how veterans' care should be organized and delivered during the next two decades.

- On June 30, 2016, the Commission on Care released their independent assessment. The Independent Assessment report provided a detailed analysis of the assessment and associated findings.

- On July 16, 2016, The American Legion issued a statement following the release of the report. To access the statement visit: http://www.legion.org/veteranshealthcare/233170/legion-statement-regarding-commission-care-report

  Through the voice of The American Legion System Worth Saving program, veterans have stated time and time again they prefer VA health care over NON-VA health care.

  To this end, The American Legion remains committed to ensuring the VA health care system remains a world-class health care system for current and future veterans.

Issue: LACK OF TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE VA

- In the Spring of 2014, an outpatient wait time scandal of grand proportion at the Phoenix VA Medical Center and later extending across the Department of Veterans Affairs VA Health Care system shocked the nation.

- The VA Inspector General was called to investigate the VA health care system. The IG found a lack of transparency and accountability on VA's part.

- The American Legion calls for transparency throughout the VA health care system. VA employees must be held accountable when a veterans is harmed or dies as a result of negligence, or willful misconduct on the part of a VA employee.

Issue: RESTORING VETERANS TRUST

Message Points

- Veterans trust remains shattered following the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) scheduling scandal of 2014. The American Legion, through its System Worth Saving conducted 11 VA hospital site visits in 2016, and plans to visit 12 VA hospitals in 2017. The American Legion supports a strong, robust VA health care system. In spite of the challenges facing the VA health care system, the VA health care system remains a "System Worth Saving," and the first step is restoring veterans trust in the VA health care system.

Issue: MEDICARE REIMBURSEMENT

Message Points:

- The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) continues to seek other revenue streams to supplement annual federal appropriations.

- VHA is authorized to bill, collect and retain payments from enrolled veterans and their health insurance insurers for inpatient and outpatient care, outpatient medications, and long-term care services, except Medicare.

- Medicare is a prepaid, federally mandated health insurance program for all eligible Americans.

- Medicare-eligible veterans should have the same opportunity as every other Medicare participant, to use their Medicare coverage in the health plan of their choice.

- Veterans pay into Medicare their entire working lives and should not be penalized because they choose to have their care in VA, which is a system designed to meet their unique health care needs.

- The Indian Health Service has demonstrated the ability to bill and collect Medicare Reimbursement.

- The American Legion seeks to amend Title 18 of the Social Security Act, to allow Medicare Reimbursement for VA on a fee-for-service basis for the treatment of non-service-connected medical conditions of enrolled, Medicare-eligible veterans.

- Enrolled, Medicare-eligible veterans should be authorized to participate in the Medicare Advantage option by choosing VA as their primary health care provider.

Issue: TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY (TBI) AND POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

Message Points:

- The American Legion remains concerned with the unprecedented numbers of veterans returning from the current conflict with Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD.

- Over the past several years, veterans returing from combat operations with traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) have been thrust into the forefront of the consciousness of the medical community.

- Decades of study in the academic medical world produced a complex constellation of medical consequences including physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive deficits.

- About 20 years ago, scientist discovered a system in the brain called the endocannabinoid system that responds to 60 chemicals in marijuana, also known as cannabis.

- This system plays a role in many of the body's functions, such as in the heart, along with the digestive, endocrine, immune, nervous, and reproductive systems. This discovery sparked interest in finding specific chemicals made from marijuana that could be targeted for specific conditions.

- Marijuana is classified as a schedule I drug. Drugs such as cocaine, methamphetamine, methadone, hydromorphone (Dilaudid), meperidine (Demerol), oxycodone (OxyContin), fentanyl, Dexedrine, Adderall, and Ritalin are scheduled II drugs.

- In April 2016, the Drug Enforcement Agency gave its approval to a study on the effect of medical marijuana on post-traumatic stress disorder. It is the first randomized, controlled research in the U.S for PTSD that will use the actual plant instead of oils or synthesized cannabis.

- By Resolution Number 11, entitled, "Medical Marijuana Research," The American Legion urges the Drug Enforcement Agency to license privately-funded medical marijuana production operations in the United States to enable safe and efficient cannabis drug development research

- Furthermore, The American Legion urges Congress to amend legislation to remove Marijuana from Schedule I, and reclassify it in a category that, recognizes cannabis as a drug with potential medical value.

Issue: VOLUNTEERING

Message Points:

- The American Legion is an organization of wartime veterans dedicated to service of the community, state, and nation.

- Service does not end when we take the uniform off.

- Veterans can continue their service in the community as an American Legion volunteer.

- The American Legion is a staunch supporter of the Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) Program, the largest volunteer program in the federal government.

- As of September 2016, there are over 7,008 regularly scheduled volunteers and who serve veterans in VA Medical Centers, Clinics, Vet Centers, Fisher Houses and State Veterans Homes across the nation.

- The American Legion volunteers contributed 645,012 hours which is valued at over $14 million in savings to the federal government.

- Volunteering to support America's veterans and their families is what The American Legion has done since our founding in 1919, and the proud tradition we carry on today.

- To register, please visit any VA Medical Center's Voluntary Service Office.

Issues: IDES REPRESENTATION

Message Points:

- The American Legion believes that service members who are being medically retired or separated should be treated fairly and receive the proper ratings from the Department of Defense and the Department of Veteran Affairs.

- The American Legion currently has two representatives that assist service members as they navigate the medical board process at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA and the Washington DC capital region.

Issues: DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE DISCHARGE UPGRADE AND CORRECTION BOARDS

Message Points:

- The American Legion is the only Veteran Service Organization that assists former service members in trying to upgrade their discharge and correct their official military record.

- This is a valuable service and due to our representation veterans can qualify for many department of Veteran Affairs benefits.

Issues: DEBT MANAGEMENT AND VA LIFE INSURANCE

Message Points:

- The American Legion employs three debt management representatives that act on the veterans best interest when an overpayment is created and a veterans benefits are in danger of being garnished.

- The representative assists by filing the appropriate application to create a payment plan or get VA to grant a waiver so as not to create a financial hardship to the veteran.

- The American Legions insurance representative handled the following claims during the last calendar year. Disability insurance applications 2, 804, death 447 and opened over 5,000 new insurance accounts.

Issues: BENEFITS DELIVERY AT DISCHARGE (BDD)

Message Points:

- The American Legion believes that transition to civilian life after service should be smoothly and seamless as possible, that a warm hand off should exist from DoD to VA. In an effort to assist transitioning service members The American Legion has responded by hiring two Assistant Directors for pre discharge claims (BDD).

- The American Legions BDD Representatives ensure that transiting service members receive the benefits they have earned through their service in a timely manner. They review claims to ensure they were properly rated and explain any additional benefits they are entitled to based on their level of service connection.

Issue: CLAIMS BACKLOG AND APPEALS MODERNIZATION

Message Points:

- The American Legion urges all eligible veterans to use the Fully Developed Claim Process when possible. The FDC process can sever the wait time by 120 days.

- The American Legion urges all veterans to establish an account with VA's eBenefits. eBenefits provides veterans with useful information to include, applying for benefits, updating personal information, and retrieving military documents.

- The American Legion urges Congress to extend the presumptive period for service connection for Gulf War Veterans with undiagnosed illness.

- The American Legion urges VA to continue to research the adverse effects of veterans with exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides. For those veterans suffering from medical conditions that are related to herbicide exposure, we insist those claims be added to the existing list of presumptive conditions associated with herbicide exposure.

- The American Legion support legislation that VA include as part of the Republic of Vietnam, for purposes of the presumption of service connection for diseases associated with exposure by veterans to certain herbicide agents while in Vietnam, such Republic's inland waterways, ports, harbors, waters offshore, and airspace.

- The American Legion urges VA to conduct an epidemiological study of the long-term health outcomes of veterans that were "Blue Water Navy," compared to their brown water and ground troop counterparts to evaluate "Blue Water Navy" veterans' current illnesses and injuries that may have manifested to herbicide exposure.

- The American legion urges DoD & VA to allow Department Service Officers to participate in the Transition Assistance Programs at all military installations.

- The American Legion will continue to press the VA to reach the Secretary's 2015 goal of no claim older than 125 days and accuracy of 98 percent. Currently, as of 21 September 2015, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) has 369,352 claims pending with 81,881 pending over 125 days. This number does not reflect claims in the appeal status, which can add years to processing of the claim. If one is to consider all claims currently pending within VBA, there are over 1.4 million claims awaiting adjudication, according to the September 2015 report.

- The American Legion urges VA to develop a work credit system that places more weight on the accuracy of claims decisions rather than the present system which rewards the number of claims processed.

- The American Legion urges VA's work credit system adequately applies negative credit to work found to be in error, whether by decision overturned on appeal, through internal reviews within the VA, such as the Systematic Technical Accuracy Review (STAR), or by other means that are applicable.

- The American Legion also urges Congress to pass the Appeals Modernization Act. Currently, nearly half a million veterans are awaiting decisions on appealed claims; most of these veterans have been waiting years for their decisions. The American Legion supports this key legislation to streamline the appeals process meanwhile providing increased ownership and would result in timelier decisions.

Resolution No. 70, 353, 293 & 327 2016 National Convention; 312, 321, 338 304, 322, 330 & 101 - 2014 National Convention; Resolution No. 244 - 2004 National Convention

Message Points:

- The American Legion supports legislation that requires the Department of Labor, Veterans Employment and Training Services (VETS) to maintain a nationwide job bank, to include but not limited to one-on-one counselling to service members transitioning out of the military. With the cessation of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Veteran Employment and Service Office VESO, the one-on-one counselling for transitioning service members will no longer available.

- The American Legion support legislation that will improve on the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), by mandating that all service members be required to attend at the very least one (1) TAP class no later than 1 year prior to the end of their enlistment, and that the curriculum include presentation (s) given by the Local Veterans' Employment Staff and or the Local Workforce center staff

- The American Legion supports legislative and/or administrative proposal that improves, but not limited to, the GI Bill, Department of Defense Tuition Assistance (TA), Higher Education Title IV funding (i.e., Pell Grants, Student Loans, etc.) and education benefits so service members, veterans, and their families can maximize its usage.

- The American Legion supports legislation to provide additional resources and increased funding for State Approving Agencies, ensuring continuation of its primary responsibility with focus in reviewing, evaluating, and approving quality programs of education and training, while providing oversight to institutions of higher learning to ensure alignment with state and federal criteria on behalf of servicemember and veteran students.

- The American Legion supports efforts to eliminate employment barriers that impede the timely and successful transfer of military job skills to the civilian labor market.

- The American Legion support oversight and legislation evaluating post-secondary education institutions on quality factors such as accreditation, transferability, cost, graduation rates, and acceptance in the job market.

  The American Legion supports efforts to expand and further disseminate the Department of Veterans Affairs GI Bill Comparison Tool.

- The American Legion supports legislative and/or administrative proposal that improves, but not limited to, the GI Bill, Department of Defense Tuition Assistance (TA), Higher Education Title IV funding (i.e., Pell Grants, Student Loans, etc.) and education benefits so service members, veterans, and their families can maximize its usage.

- The American Legion urge Congress to pursue systems that provide timely, contextual, and actionable data necessary to calculate "return on investment" measures, but also to document continuous improvement within higher education institutions and training programs, as this information is vital to ensure

transparency, accountability, and alignment which are all critical pieces of the efforts to improve the outcomes of our education and workforce development systems.

- The American Legion supports the efforts of the Small Business Administration's Office of Veterans' Business Development to provide enhanced outreach and community-based assistance to veterans and self-employed members of the Reserves and National Guard.

- The American Legion strongly supports veterans' preference in federal, state, and local government, opposes all efforts to reduce this preference, and continues to speak publicly on the issue of veterans' preference.

- The American Legion supports legislation that would give state or federal grants, tax credits and/or subsidies to employers who utilize veterans' preference within their hiring practices.

- The American Legion supports the Department of Veterans Affairs enacting a plan to increase the percentage of veterans employed by the agency to 50 percent.

- The American Legion supports continued funding for permanent supportive housing through the Department of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development partnership (HUD-VASH), which provides homeless veterans with stable housing and intensive case management services.

- The American Legion supports legislation that will preserve the integrity, intent and purpose of Title 38, Chapters 41, 42, and 43, by prohibiting the Department of Labor efforts in implementing Training and Guidance Letter 19-13 or other directives that restricts or forbids services to veterans by Local Veterans' Employment Representatives or Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialists.