Protecting the American flag

The American Legion strongly believes the U.S. flag is a symbol of our nation's freedom and all that we hold in common as Americans, secured by military men and women who sacrificed so much for all citizens. That is why The American Legion continues to urge Congress to propose and approve an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would allow the Congress to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States. Our interest is not to silence those who protest perceived injustices. Americans have the right to voice their views in respectful ways. And we are not alone in this belief. The U.S. House of Representatives has routinely passed such an amendment to protect the flag. Every state has endorsed such a resolution. And surveys show that a majority of Americans still agree that the flag should be protected. The proposed flag protection amendment is no infringement on the Bill of Rights. Instead, it is an exercise in the popular sovereignty the Bill of Rights was designed to protect. *(Resolution No. 303, August 2016)*

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

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THE AMERICAN LEGION

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

for the 116th Congress

Second Session

Updated September 18, 2020

THE AMERICAN LEGION LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FOR THE 116TH CONGRESS

Toxic exposures and burn pits

Millions of veterans have been deployed in the Global War on Terror, and a disturbingly high percentage of them have been exposed to airborne toxic hazards during their service as a result of burn pits. The American Legion has for decades fought for service-connected disability benefits for adverse health conditions linked to toxic exposures in service and will continue to do so for this generation. The American Legion supports measures to establish a presumption of exposure as well as continued studies on the effects of burn pits. *(S. 2950)*

Health care for women veterans

VA must continue to develop and expand health-care services for the fast-growing population of female veterans, a large percentage of whom do not enroll for VA health care for a number of reasons, according to surveys. Among the factors are limited gender-specific treatment services and awareness of VA benefits. All veterans, regardless of gender, must receive fair and equal VA health-care services. *(S. 514, H.R. 3224)*

Support VA's suicide-prevention efforts

An estimated 20 veterans die by suicide every day. Most were not receiving care or support through VA that may have saved them. The American Legion supports expanding and promoting mental health treatment for veterans and urges Congress to provide VA necessary funds to hire mental health professionals and proper staffing for its Integrative Health and Wellness Program. *(S. 785)*

Reaffirm commitment to our allies

In a time of rising great power competition, the United States must maintain a strong alliance system to promote democracy and protect our national interests abroad. Diplomacy is the first line of defense for the United States and must be properly resourced and funded to ensure we put our service members in harm's way only when absolutely necessary. The American Legion supports bills that would provide the State Department necessary resources to maintain and expand our alliance system, ensure aid programs to allies remain properly funded, and promote our national interests abroad. *(H.Res 220)*

Fully fund a superior national defense

The American Legion supports a defense budget that complies with the Pentagon's 2018 National Defense Strategy in order to reverse the damaging effects of sequestration, provide fair compensation of military personnel and modernize the U.S. military to protect against any aggression, especially in a time of growing great power competition. *(Resolution 35, 2018)*

Pay the Coast Guard

On a daily basis, U.S. Coast Guard personnel carry out missions that are vital to national security. The Coast Guard, however, is the only military branch forced to work without pay during a government shutdown. This is unacceptable. The repeated and all too common threat of government shutdowns brings severe hardship on our Coast Guard members and their families. No member of the U.S. military service should ever live in fear of not being paid. The American Legion supports bills and provisions that will ensure the Coast Guard is paid during government shutdowns. *(S. 21, H.R. 367)*

Implement, oversee recent laws

The 115th Congress passed multiple American Legion-supported bills that help veterans and their families, from the backlog-aimed VA Appeals Modernization Act to the omnibus VA MISSION Act. The Legion continues to call on the 116th Congress to ensure these measures are accurately and quickly implemented, as intended.

Protect the GI Bill

With passage of the Forever GI Bill, Congress should now focus on ensuring that student veterans and their families receive the highest quality education when using their GI Bill benefits. The American Legion believes that legislation and federal agency action should be taken to ensure better quality and student outcomes for servicemembers and veterans, by excluding DoD and VA funds from the 90-10 calculation for federal student aid. Also, Congress should create common-sense oversight of schools and give military-connected students the same rights as non-veterans when their schools close, when they face an overpayment, and when a school loses its eligibility to operate. *(H.R. 4625, S. 2857)*

Help end veteran homelessness

To fully implement VA's pledge to eradicate veteran homelessness, Congress must continue making investments in affordable housing and programs such as Supportive Services for Veteran Families that move veterans and their families off the streets and into stable housing with supportive services. *(Resolution 340, 2016)*

Support for Gold Star families

The families of our fallen service members forever bear the burden of the losing loved ones who gave their last full measure of devotion in defense of our great nation, security and freedom. The American Legion is dedicated to ensuring Gold Star families receive the absolute best care and services from the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs. *(Resolution 14, 2018)*