

**The
American
Legion**



For God and country

Suggested Speech

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The American Legion 101ST Birthday 2020

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Principles over politics. Patriotism over Partisanship.
Policies over personalities. This has been the manner
in which The American Legion has advocated for
meaningful veterans legislation over the last 101
years. It is why we are the most respected and
successful veterans' organization in the country.

It is especially worth remembering during election
years such as this.

During one of the earliest meetings of The American
Legion – the St. Louis Caucus in 1919– a movement
was afoot to nominate Theodore Roosevelt, Junior, as
the first national commander of the organization. A
World War I hero and the son of a former president,
T.R. Junior was widely perceived to have political
ambitions and possibly even follow in his father's
footsteps. A term as national commander would be a
nice stepping stone toward future elected offices for
the young Republican.

But Roosevelt would have none of this. Over shouts of “We Want Teddy,” Roosevelt told the crowd, “I wish to withdraw my name for a number of reasons....We are gathered together for a very high purpose. I want every American through the length and breadth of this land to realize that there is not a man in this caucus who is seeking anything for himself, personally, but that he is simply working for the good of the entire situation.”

Roosevelt knew that the best way for The American Legion to advance its founding pillars of fighting for a strong national defense, caring for veterans, establishing wholesome youth programs and promoting Americanism was to avoid partisanship, political labels and even the perception of personal ambition.

While many Democrats, Republicans and independents have been active in The American Legion during its 101-year history, the organization was beholden only to “God and Country.”

There would be no political action committees, endorsements for public office or kowtowing to corporate lobbyists. Legionnaires would be educated about veterans’ issues and other items pertaining to the four pillars and be encouraged to vote according to their consciences.

Since The American Legion is beholden to no political party, it is widely respected by members of both major political parties. Most importantly, it is respected for what it does every day in communities across America.

The American Legion serves the youth of America with outstanding programs such as American Legion Baseball, Junior Shooting Sports, Boys State and Boys Nation.

The American Legion has supported the Boy Scouts of America since 1919 and today charters approximately 2,300 Scouting units comprising more than 61,000 young people.

Moreover, The American Legion High School Oratorical Program is a constitutional speech contest that has awarded more than three million dollars in scholarships to young men and women since its establishment.

And our support has made a difference to the recipients of Child Welfare Foundation grants, which are used to educate the public about diseases such as juvenile diabetes, Marfan Syndrome and autism.

We have not forgotten the young people whose parents have made the ultimate sacrifice or have suffered from serious disabilities during the war on terrorism. The American Legion's Legacy Scholarship Fund was created to help pay for the college educations of those who lost a military parent serving since 9/11 or had a parent incur a 50 percent disability rating.

We also support a strong veterans health care system, support that has undoubtedly saved countless lives.

The American Legion does these things not because it can, but because it's who we are.

The author of America's greatest legislation, Past National Commander Harry Colmery, knew that it was right for America to remember returning war veterans by making it possible for them to obtain formal educations and purchase homes.

While others scoffed that such a benefit would 'break the treasury,' The American Legion held firm and ensured the passage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill of Rights.

But The American Legion did not rest on its laurels even after that significant and historical accomplishment.

Today we are still serving and still fighting.

We are fighting to improve post-9/11 GI Bill benefits so the current generation of veterans can pursue the educational opportunities needed to succeed in the 21st century.

We are fighting to ensure veterans have access to quality health care and that the VA System is responsive to the unique medical needs of people who have served this country.

While some groups criticize the high cost of veteran benefits, The American Legion reminds the public that the true debt is one that can never be truly repaid – it is a cost that is on display in every U.S. military and veteran cemetery around the globe.

Benefits are not given, they are earned and available to anyone who is willing to visit their local recruiter and sign the dotted line.

We are also fighting to make sure that the flag of the United States is constitutionally protected from desecration.

If it's sacred enough to place on a soldier's coffin, it is important enough to protect from physical desecration.

Thousands of American Legion service officers nationwide help veterans access high-quality VA health care and disability compensation. We are the nation's leading advocates for enhanced treatment of traumatic brain injuries, Post Traumatic Stress

Disorder and other medical conditions associated with military service.

Through our Operation Comfort Warriors program, The American Legion turns financial donations into gifts for wounded, injured and ill servicemembers recovering in military hospitals, VA Centers and warrior transition units around the world. OCW gifts may not make these veterans “whole” again, but they do show that The American Legion appreciates their service and sacrifice.

Another way The American Legion supports the troops is by assisting their families while they are deployed. Whether it’s mowing a lawn or shopping for groceries, the American Legion’s Family Support Network stands ready to assist those who need it most.

This is our American Legion Birthday and a time to reflect on the 101 years that have passed since the founding of our great organization. National Commander Bill Oxford is calling for us to look ahead and build a Foundation for the Future.

The manner in which The American Legion delivers its services must adapt and change with the times, but our core principles and pillars remain unwavering.

Commander Oxford has adopted The American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation as his major fundraising project for the year. In addition to providing training for service officers, this great foundation funds temporary financial assistance to veterans with young children in need.

The Foundation provided more than one million dollars of assistance to Coast Guard families impacted by the 2019 federal government shutdown.

And your American Legion continues to call on Congress to pass the Pay Our Coast Guard Act to ensure that the Coast Guard, like the other military services, will be paid during future shutdowns.

The American Legion's influence extends far beyond Washington. It is found in statehouses, city councils and campuses throughout the country.

It is The American Legion's presence in the community that makes a difference. It is the true value of our memberships.

It's displayed on an American Legion baseball field, in a recently renovated VA hospital wing or at a veterans memorial that was built with American Legion financial support.

We are not in this for ourselves; we are in this for our brothers and sisters-in-arms. We are in this for the husbands, wives and parents of those who served.

And like President Lincoln once promised, we do this to “care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan.”

As it has been since our founding, citizens of this great nation know that when America calls, American Legionnaires will continue to say “At your service!”

The American Legion will always be an organization of principles, not politics.

God Bless you and God Bless America!

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