



THE AMERICAN LEGION
Veterans Strengthening America

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

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The American Legion
105th Birthday
March 15-17, 2024

The American Legion
Media & Communications Division

It was supposed to be the “war to end all wars,” but the wounds and scars were as horrifying as any conflict that preceded it. Trench warfare, mustard gas and what was then called “shell shock” took their toll on many of our World War I dough boys.

Newspapers in the United States reported incidents of disabled veterans, starving and ignored by the government, collapsing on street corners.

Some communities, not wanting to deal with their disabled warriors, hid them from sight. Major American cities had “ugly ordinances,” which required disfigured people to cover their injuries – even those sustained in war. These heroes were forced to wear masks or hoods in public to conceal their faces or face arrest and imprisonment.

More than 300,000 soldiers returned home with serious physical or mental disabilities. Having put an enormous amount of its financial resources into mobilizing the army, navy and Marine Corps, the government paid little attention to the problems of rehabilitation or long-term medical care for wounded veterans.

Elected officials and government bureaucrats had forgotten the promises made in President Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address. Care for those who had borne the battle was no longer a priority in postwar America.

Some lawmakers displayed their insensitivity to wounded warriors by questioning the moral fiber of disabled veterans who were seeking compensation and financial assistance.

It was during this period of widespread disregard for our veterans that The American Legion was born.

In the early days of The American Legion, Past National Commander Hanford MacNider wrote, “The first duty of The American Legion is to see that those men who came back from the service, blind, maimed ... broken in health and spirit ... who must live through the war forever in their homes throughout the country ... get a square deal from the Government they fought for.”

“A square deal” is what President Teddy Roosevelt, the father of one of The American Legion’s legendary founders, promised to all Americans more than a decade earlier. The apple didn’t fall far from the tree – as Teddy Roosevelt Jr., the son of the Rough Rider himself, became a leader and advocate for this new organization called “The American Legion.”

Of The American Legion's founding, Teddy Junior voiced that his only regret was -quote- "that my father could not have been alive...to see the action of this body of Americans," unquote.

Among other timeless truths, The American Legion was dedicated to the promotion of "peace and goodwill on earth; to safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy; to consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness."

In The American Legion, a veteran was a veteran regardless of religious faith, or whether they were enlisted or commissioned, black or white, male or female.

In fact, women Legionnaires were able to vote for national commander before they could legally vote for the president of the United States.

Through the Legion's hard work and efforts, the U.S. Veterans Bureau was created. It was the forerunner of the Veterans Administration and later, the Department of Veterans Affairs.

For 105 years now, The American Legion has led the charge as America's leading advocate for veterans health care and rehabilitation, children and youth programs, a strong national security policy and one-hundred percent Americanism.

When the Ku Klux Klan was at the height of its power, The American Legion passed Resolution 407 in 1923. It declared that groups fostering racial, religious or class strife were “un-American, a menace to our liberties,” and “inconsistent with the ideals and purposes of The American Legion.”

In 1944, Harry W. Colmery, a Legion past national commander, wrote the first draft of what later became the "GI Bill of Rights," the Legion's greatest legislative achievement. It made college educations, home and business loans available to millions of veterans and revitalized the American economy.

As decades passed, the public's memory receded, and veterans had seen their educational benefits diminish.

Once again, The American Legion answered the call by championing the rights of Post 9/11 veterans, which led to a new GI Bill that included families as well.

Over the last several years, The American Legion has made the prevention of veteran suicide its top mission. By encouraging all Americans to "be the one" to end the stigmas associated with seeking mental wellness, The American Legion has saved the lives of veterans in crisis. American Legion posts worldwide have conducted "buddy checks" to connect with those who served, a practice that has been officially adopted by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Since 2020, The American Legion's network of accredited service officers obtained more than 62.1 billion dollars in disability compensation for veterans. They did this free of charge to the veteran and regardless of membership status.

We provided nearly half a million dollars of grants last year to sponsor events and purchase comfort items through our Operation Comfort Warriors program, created to support wounded, injured and ill veterans.

The American Legion has thrived for 105 years because, while our organization continues to preserve the memories of those who have made great sacrifice, we also serve the future of our nation – America's youth.

And, ladies and gentlemen, if you have ever witnessed one of our Oratorical contests or met the youth champions that The American Legion honors every year at our national convention, you know that the future is bright!

Our influence can be seen in the Major Leagues, where many of the greatest ballplayers in the world can be counted as American Legion Baseball alumni.

It can be seen in the halls of Congress, governors' offices or business communities, where some of the most successful leaders are graduates of American Legion Boys State and Boys Nation.

From teaching flag etiquette to leading the charge to protect Old Glory from desecration, The American Legion is seen as the leading authority and guardian of the flag of our great nation.

We believe that peace can only be achieved through strength. Nobody hates war more than the warrior, but we also believe that our nation's constitution is worth fighting for.

National Defense, Americanism, Veterans and Youth. These are the bedrock principles that made The American Legion a great idea in 1919 and make it a great organization today.

To each of you, I say thank you for your service, for what you do for our veterans and for our country.

I also say happy birthday to our great American Legion and may there be many more.

God bless America and God bless our American Legion Family.