

Issue: NATIONAL SECURITY PRINCIPLES OF THE AMERICAN LEGION

Message Points:

Since its inception in 1919 The American Legion has supported a strong national defense which is reflected in its own Preamble to the Constitution, namely, "To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America," and "to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation".

The United States is faced with a myriad of short and long-term challenges to include terrorism, rogue nation-states, and nuclear weapons proliferation. As such, The American Legion upholds the following national security principles as fundamental to the best interests of the United States:

- The National Security Strategy needs to be reassessed so that missions and resources are more closely aligned. This requires thorough and efficient quarterly Defense and Diplomacy reviews.
- The credibility of the United States in an unstable world needs to be maintained by retaining the requisite military capabilities to deal with actual and potential threats. The American Legion continues to urge Congress to fully fund our Armed Forces and to resist any peace dividend proposal to divert essential funds from defense programs.
- The National Guard and Reserves must be realistically manned, structured, equipped, trained, fully deployable and maintained at high readiness levels and not over-utilized in order to accomplish their increasing and indispensable missions and roles in our national defense.
- Peacetime Selective Service registration should be retained so as to maintain our capability to rapidly reconstitute forces in the event of emergencies or war.
- Force modernization for the Services needs to be realistically funded, and not further delayed, or American lives may be unnecessarily placed in harms' way in the years ahead. Production of airlift and sealift assets need to be expedited.
- The American people expect that whenever U.S. forces are committed, that they will be committed only when America's vital national interests are threatened and only as a last resort after all reasonable alternatives have been exhausted.
- Full support of peacekeeping, peace enforcement, peace-making and humanitarian operations as they are becoming more frequent and necessary in waging the sustained war on terror.
- The honorable nature of military service should be upheld as it not only represents fulfillment of American patriotic obligation but is also a privilege and responsibility that embodies the highest form of service to the nation.

- The United States Government must honor its obligations to all service members, veterans, military retirees and their families. Lasting compensations and incentives should be equitable.
- Major incentives for military service should continue to include an enhanced GI Bill for education and training, improved quality of life features, and a reduced operational tempo in order to recruit and retain a quality and fully-manned force which is professionally-led.
- The United States Government must retain the necessary deployed forces worldwide to accomplish both, short term as well as long term, commitments and contingencies and to protect the nation's vital interest worldwide.

Issue: SUPPORT FOR THE WAR ON TERRORISM

Message Points:

The United States of America was suddenly, and without provocation, attacked by terrorists on September 11, 2001, resulting in the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians and members of the military of the United States. This tragic event does not stand alone, but is a continuation of a long series of unprovoked terrorist attacks aimed at destroying American lives, and the very basic core values of freedom, democracy and respect for human life. In response to this despicable act of cowardice, a united Congress in a bipartisan manner authorized the use of armed force against the global armies of terrorism no matter where they reside.

Recognizing that the global war on terrorism is as deadly as any war in which the United States has been previously engaged, the President and Congress did authorize military actions in both Afghanistan and Iraq. The global war on terrorism is a just war, aimed at protecting the very foundations of freedom and freedom-loving people everywhere. The 2010 American Legion Convention adopted this resolution which states:

- The American Legion fully supports the men, women and leadership of our armed forces as they are engaged in the global war on terrorism.
- The American Legion urges all Americans and freedom-loving peoples everywhere to stand united in their support of the global war on terrorism, and united in their support of the troops who are engaged in protecting our values and way of life.
- The National Commander be, and is hereby authorized, to use whatever means at his disposal to disseminate accurate information about this war on terrorism, and to engage whatever means necessary to ensure the united support of the American people.

Issue: QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ACTIVE FORCES, RESERVISTS AND MILITARY RETIREE VETERANS

Message Points:

The American Legion has always supported quality-of-life features for service members and their dependents as well as military retirees and their survivors, as people are the foundation of our nation's fighting forces. Without highly qualified, dedicated and experienced men and women warriors, even the most sophisticated weaponry will not provide the deterrent force necessary for this nation to remain at peace or to defend our vital national interests.

Military compensation is only one factor in the quality-of-life equation. Other major factors include fair treatment; career stability; regular promotions; adequate housing; accessible quality health care; commissaries; cost of living salary increases that adjust fairly to the total cost of living, not just inflation; day care; educational facilities; and recreational facilities. Each of these quality-of-life factors help to ease the numerous hardships and personal sacrifices that are demanded of service members and their families.

The American Legion therefore supports the following with respect to military compensation:

- Military pay comparability for the armed forces by closing the gap between military and private sector pay and having pay raises become competitive with the private sector.
- Regular increases in the Basic Allowances for Quarters (BAQ) rates to keep pace with cost of living increases and regional differences in housing market costs.
- Preserving attractive retirement systems for the active and Reserve components with annual COLA's paid at the same rate, and concurrently, with other Federal retiree COLAs.
- Full funding of concurrent receipt of military retirement pay, military separation pays, and VA disability compensation as well as Special Compensation payments for disabled military retirees.
- Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) premiums paid up after payment for 30 years or until age 70, whichever comes first, and that pension payments not be offset by Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) benefit payments.
- Providing a responsive, service independent, military appeals avenue and process in which to appeal medical separation and retirement, discharge upgrade and correction of military record board decisions that impact separating and retiring service personnel and their subsequent quality-of- life.

- Providing a fair Disability Evaluation System for wounded and ill warriors as they strive to make a seamless transition back to civilian life and their communities.
- Our service members and dependents deserve, and have earned, entitlement to the best quality-of-life standards and benefits that a grateful nation can offer. Without high quality-of-life standards, it will be impossible to recruit and retain the high quality personnel so necessary to protect America and our freedom and to sustain our vital interests.

Issue: TRICARE

Message Points:

The American Legion resists increases in TRICARE premiums to retirees and adamantly opposes any proposal that will significantly and negatively impact quality of life benefits for honorable military service.

- The American Legion believes that the Department of Defense (DoD) to reconsider any proposals to implement any increases in military retirees' TRICARE enrollment fees, deductibles, or premiums.
- Before those proposals are considered all efforts must be shown to have been exhausted to remove waste, fraud, and abuse from the TRICARE program.
- Any increases need to be reinvested in the TRICARE program to improve healthcare access for retirees and their families and not returned to the general DoD budget for other purposes.
- And any increases should, by law, have no negative impact on retirees financially, and that any increase must be directly tied to and not exceed the annual cost of living adjustment (COLA) percentage provided to retirees.
- The American Legion will continue research and advocate for the best course of action to insure the most effective, lowest cost, and responsible way to deliver healthcare to retirees, veterans, and their families.
- The American Legion urges the Congress to authorize and fund the Department of Defense (DOD) in providing permanent TRICARE healthcare for members of the Reserve Components and their dependents.
- The American Legion supports an effort to encourage the TRICARE Management Authority, a department within The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), to include Chiropractic care for veterans in the TRICARE health care package.

Some Basics On TRICARE Options For Beneficiaries:

TRICARE PRIME – All active-duty service members must be Prime. Other beneficiaries have options. PRIME Remote is needed if a service member lives more than 50 miles from nearest military treatment facility. There is also TRICARE Overseas Prime (TOP) and TRICARE Global Remote Overseas (TGRO) Prime.

TRICARE STANDARD – This option is available for all other beneficiaries. It also serves as the supplemental to Medicare in the TRICARE for Life option for retirees.

TRICARE EXTRA – Offers additional discounts to TRICARE Standard participants when they use TRICARE Network providers.

Other options that are really just an extensions or derivatives of TRICARE STANDARD are - TRICARE Reserve Select (does not include Individual ready Reserve – IRR-); TRICARE PLUS (allows patients on Standard to be seen at Military Treatment facilities in the same priority as TRICARE PRIME patients).

Continued Health Care Benefit Program (CHCBP) CHCBP is a premium-based health care program providing medical coverage to a select group of former military beneficiaries. CHCBP is similar to, but not part of, TRICARE. The CHCBP program extends health care coverage to the certain eligible individuals when they lose their military benefits.

TRICARE For Life (TFL) is TRICARE's Medicare-wraparound coverage available to *all* military Medicare-eligible TRICARE beneficiaries, regardless of age, provided they have Medicare Parts A and B. While Medicare is one's primary insurance, TRICARE acts as one's secondary payer minimizing out-of-pocket expenses. TRICARE benefits include covering Medicare's coinsurance and deductible.

Issue: SUPPORT FOR DOMESTIC CONTROL OF ENERGY RESOURCES

Message Points:

The American Legion urges the Administration and Congress to develop an energy policy and plan that recognizes the critical importance of ensuring domestic control of our energy resources from production through use.

The American Legion urges the Administration and Congress aggressively pursue further development of domestic sources of energy to include:

- Increasing domestic petroleum and natural gas exploration and production.
- Increasing the domestic electricity supply by building additional nuclear energy plants.
- Increasing domestic capacity of solar, hydroelectric, geothermal and wind energy electrical generation and renovating America's electrical grid.
- Greater utilization of alternative fuels through increased development of biomass and ethanol production.
- The American Legion encourages intensive diplomatic efforts be made to develop further energy trading alliances with countries of unquestioned long-standing friendship and where security of the energy resources can be assured in order to assist in development of their energy resources.

Issue: COMBATING CYBERSPACE THREATS

Message Points:

The security of the United States is being challenged increasingly by non-traditional threats which may extend the fields of battle and terrorism to computer cyberspace and in which inexpensive nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction, including disease as a weapon of war, may be employed.

- The American Legion supports the formation of a comprehensive and integrated system of federal agencies (including the Armed Forces, law enforcement, intelligence and public health) to detect, deter and defend against cyberspace threats to critical government and private infrastructures.
- The American Legion urges the Congress to appropriate the necessary funding and resources to combat the continuing cyberspace and other threats to the United States in the 21st Century and also urges the American public to be vigilant of cyberspace attacks. All efforts should be made to detect, deter and defend against the threats of cyber warfare, and to prosecute violators to the fullest extent of the law.

Issue: HOMELAND SECURITY

Message Points:

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on American soil have made Americans painfully aware of their vulnerability to violence from international terrorism. These terrorists were able to carry out their attacks because previous emphasis by the U.S. Government on homeland security and intelligence collection, while improving over recent years, had been inadequate and incapable of preventing such attacks.

- The American Legion supports the full funding of the Department of Homeland Security so as to harmonize the many agencies and offices with Homeland Security responsibilities into a viable and credible deterrent to those who seek to inflict violence on the United States and the American people.
- U.S. national intelligence agencies also need to be fully funded. Their efforts and data collection should be expanded and coordinated. The American Legion supports legislation that would strengthen the abilities of the United States Departments of Justice, Homeland Security, U.S. Customs, Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Internal Revenue Service to police, investigate and prosecute financial institutions or individuals within the parameters of the U.S. Constitution that use legitimate and illegitimate financial means to help support both domestic and international terrorism.
- The American Legion also reaffirms its Citizen Corps affiliation, and urges Congress to support and fully fund all components of Citizen Corps. The American Legion has published an award-winning pamphlet on Disaster Preparedness and urges all Legionnaires to take part in personal and community disaster preparedness events, particularly those affiliated with Citizen Corps programs. The American Legion urges Congress to keep Citizen Corps as a permanent part of the nation's approach to homeland security and disaster preparedness.
- A Congressionally sanctioned Commission to Assess the Threat to the U.S. from Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) has clearly defined the vulnerabilities in America's homeland defense posture to include potential catastrophic damage to U.S. infrastructure, telecommunications, banking, energy, transportation, food, water, emergency services, space systems and government agencies. The American Legion urges the United States Government to fully fund, develop, and deploy a national ballistic missile defense system designed to intercept EMP attacks. The American Legion urges the United States Government to swiftly commission the further development and installation of electronic equipment and components resistant to EMP.

Issue: MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY STANDARDS

Message Points:

The American Legion has long recognized the significant role and the contributions of women serving in the military services of the United States of America. Women veterans have been eligible for full membership in The American Legion since its founding in 1919, prior to the full franchise of women to vote in Presidential elections. There are 213,828 women serving on active duty in the military comprising 14.5% of the total active force, and 71,182 women serving in the National Guard and Reserve comprising 15.2% of the total Guard and Reserve—all serving with distinction, honor, and valor.

- The American Legion, believes strongly that the Department of Defense and all branches of the military services must maintain the current physical, mental requirements and qualifications for acceptance into military service that has created the best and most respected military in the world.
- That the mental and physical qualifications of all military personnel, regardless of gender or age, should be held to a single duty position-specific standing depending on Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) and not be amended without Congressional authority.
- That 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,” since Congress and only Congress can codify the elimination of the “combat exclusion clause for women.”
- That 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: THE AMERICAN LEGION'S POSITION ON THE OPERATIONAL RESERVE

Message Points:

The American Legion has tirelessly advocated for a strong national defense in times of conflict and times of peace. Historically, America has in times of relative peace, looked for an immediate economic “peace dividend”. This fervent call for cost savings has repeatedly placed the national security of the nation at risk. The nation is currently undergoing severe economic times. Once again the Department of Defense, in order to meet budget constraints has been required to reduce active duty end strength. A reduction in end strength will require a continued and even increased dependence on the reserve component in the form of an “Operational Reserve” to meet mission requirements. National security imperatives placed on the Department of Defense due to worldwide instability will increase the need for forward projection of the military instrument of national power.

- The American Legion believes Congress needs to reform the laws and policies governing the reserve components in ways that provides them programmable sustainability as an operational force.
- The Department of Defense should be directed to, in compliance with those laws and policies, establish missions and funding streams supporting taskings consistent with the National Defense Authorization Act, the Quadrennial Defense Review, the National Security Strategy, and the National Military Strategy, which directly impact national security and support the readiness of and the rotational nature of the operational reserve.
- President of the United States should delegate to the Secretary of Defense, the authority to “call to Federal Service,” and mission those Reserve Component personnel necessary to support the National Security Strategy, and the National Military Strategy by maintaining the operational reserve as a vital part of the operational force.

Issue: SUPPORT FOR LEGISLATION PROHIBITING HATE SPEECH AT MILITARY FUNERALS

Message Points:

Since its creation, the United States has honored its war dead by a sacred tradition of military funerals, and continues to treat its war dead with sanctity, dignity and honor, and recognizes the ultimate sacrifice made to protect, defend, and preserve the freedoms and way of life in the United States.

- The American Legion finds the targeted protest of servicemember funerals to be a vile and despicable act and not worthy of American citizens who enjoy the freedoms only made possible through the sacrifice and death of military heroes.
- The American Legion urges Congress to designate political protests planned and conducted at targeted servicemember funerals as hate speech prohibited by law.
- Congress needs to define the official mourning period for service members killed in combat to be at least one week.
- Congress needs to prohibit the planning for, or conduct of, protests aimed at a specific member of the military or the related family within the one mile radius of activity pertaining to funeral services, procession, and internment for a period of one day before and one day after the official mourning period.

Issue: RESERVES AND NATIONAL GUARD RETIREMENT BENEFIT FAIRNESS

Message Points:

The Congress of the United States has passed laws that would allow Reserves and National Guard members retirement credit points to retire early provided that they served on active duty for 90 consecutive days in a fiscal year and have completed 20 years of service before the age of 60 years.

The effective date for this benefit is for those who served after its signing in early 2008. The law signed leaves out all the Reserves and National Guard members who were activated between August 2, 1990 through present that would give them credit for their active duty service toward early retirement.

- The American Legion urges the Congress of the United States to amend the regulation that allows early retirement for Reserves and National Guard members who have completed 20 years of service and have not reached the age of 60 years and have been activated to Active Federal Duty since August 2, 1990 affording them the same benefit as those who served after the signing of the law.

Issue: IDENTIFYING NATIONAL INTERESTS BEFORE COMMITTING MILITARY ASSETS

Message Points:

One of The American Legion's founding principles is National Security and The American Legion considers itself to be a partner with the Department of Defense in insuring the nation's security. 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 Act of 1973 requires the President to advise the Congress and American people what national security interest is served by committing US forces to combat in a sovereign nation.

- The American Legion supports the War Power's Resolution of 1973(50 U.S.C.1541-1548).
- The American Legion, in keeping with its founding principles, Strong National Security, calls on the President of the United States, in compliance with the War Powers Resolution to inform the American people, and the Congress of the United States of the critical national interests served by committing U.S. Forces or military assets to hostile action.
- Before committing military assets to hostile action, specific goals, overwhelming force levels necessary to accomplish the goals, and 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 United States Congress.
- The American Legion defines hostile action as any action where the use of lethal force is, conducted, imminent, or implied to accomplish a military objective within the borders of a sovereign foreign nation.
- The American Legion calls on 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: NATIONAL DEFENSE FUNDING

Message Points:

One of The American Legion's founding principles is National Security. The primary function of government is to insure the security of its people and infrastructure. The Department of Defense has already conducted program reviews which have cut \$178 billion dollars from its future budget requests. Further cuts to the DOD budget will do irreparable and irreversible harm to the military capability of the U.S. to defend the nation. The U.S. military has been at war for over 10 years causing equipment shortages and the extension of equipment useful life span to dangerous levels. The American Legion has called for a minimum 5% of GDP funding for the Department of Defense, in times of war.

- That The American Legion calls on Congress and the Administration to cease all efforts to reduce the defense budget from its current level.

Issue: CONCURRENT RECEIPT

Message Points:

- Concurrent receipt occurs when a veteran fully collects a Department of Defense (DoD) retirement or pension and VA disability compensation. A retirement payments are the reward for long and dedicated service, pension payments are for sustaining a medical condition that renders a service member unfit for duty. VA disability compensation is awarded for medical conditions manifested as a result of military service.
- Prior to the passage of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2004, veterans with less than a 100 percent VA disability rating were required to have their DoD retirements and pensions deducted by their VA disability compensation amounts. This procedure has become known as the “disabled veterans’ tax”.
- The 2004 NDAA altered the method military retirees received their DoD and VA compensations. A phase-in progression was instituted with the NDAA passage; a military retiree with a 50 percent or greater VA disability rating was permitted concurrent receipt and receive a full DoD retirement and disability compensation. The phase-in period to include all military retirees collecting VA disability compensation regardless of disability rating is to conclude on December 31, 2013.
- While the 2004 NDAA addressed military retirees with at least 20 years of service, it failed to address veterans retired due for medical reasons. Legislation has been introduced in both houses of the 112th Congress to eliminate the disability tax and permit all military retirees concurrent receipt prior to December 2013. Bills proposed by Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., and Rep. Sanford Bishop, D-Ga., have 97 co-sponsors address eliminating the ban on concurrent receipt.
- Past National Commander Jimmie L. Foster stated on April 1, 2011, “The military pension is a benefit you earned by doing a job well for a long time. VA disability compensation is provided to those whose ability to work is compromised due to military service.” He added, “Tell me how it makes sense that you should lose your pension because you got hurt? These men and women chose to make the military a career; they didn’t choose to suffer an injury. In the private sector, a vested employee does not forfeit his or her pension when an injury causes him or her to go on disability.”
- It is fundamentally unfair to deduct a veteran’s retirement due to a condition caused by military service. The veteran’s payment occurred when the body was sacrificed allowing for the condition to manifest in support of the mission. This payment should not be considered a down payment with monthly payments to occur through DoD deductions for the rest of the veteran’s life. Instead, the federal government should observe the veteran’s payment as a singular payment for which separate compensation of the disability should be paid and not demand the veteran have the disability deducted from retirement payments.

Issue: AMERICAN LEGION STATEMENT OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES

Message Points:

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

- Recognition that the US has extensive 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 which are consistent with US 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 US 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 US sovereignty and serve US national interests.
- Participation in an increasingly interdependent Free World trading system based on fair and equitable trading practices.
- Recognition that the President is the chief architect of US foreign policy as envisioned in the US Constitution, while Congress performs the functions of advice, oversight, funding, and ratification of treaties.
- Support for the appropriate resources to promote and protect US vital national interests worldwide.

Issue: AMERICAN LEGION FOREIGN POLICY ON TERRORISM

Message Points:

- The American Legion supports a global fight on multiple fronts to end the scourge of terrorism.
- The American Legion supports policies and legislation that will enhance funding for the US Agency for International Development (USAID) within the Department of State and seeks use of that funding towards targeted states whose failure to provide for its people could result in the expansion of international terrorism.
- That The American Legion supports legislation and foreign policy that specifically targets diplomatic, economic and educational programs to promote greater and peaceful democratic reforms in Countries within the Arabian Gulf and Middle Eastern Region.
- The American Legion believes that the US Government should support African nations that clearly demonstrate open democratic reforms, human rights protection, and cooperation in the fight against international terrorism.

Issue: AMERICAN LEGION POW/MIA POLICY

Message Points:

Many Americans remain missing in action or otherwise unaccounted for from America's past foreign wars and conflicts, and reports indicate that in former enemy areas where Americans could still be alive, information has been deliberately and cruelly withheld. The families of POW/MIA suffer untold grief and uncertainty due to the lack of any accurate accounting, often in spite of the heroic efforts of US search teams.

- The American Legion urges the President and the Congress to support legislation and policies that will use all reasonable resources to achieve the fullest possible accounting of all missing American service members regardless of location or era of loss.

Issue: SUPPORT FOR THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Message Points:

- The American Legion is a strong supporter of the U.S. State Department and the various functions it performs for the American public overseas. The United States Department of State is the first line of defense of the nation in combating the myriad of security threats that face America from abroad. The State Department and its affiliated organizations are charged with an number of important missions; managing diplomatic coalitions with other countries and international institutions, promoting peace and stability in regions of vital interest, bringing nations together to address global challenges, creating jobs at home by opening markets abroad, and helping developing nations establish stable economic environments that provide investment and export opportunities.
- The State Department has historically been allocated just little more than 1% of the total federal budget to accomplish all of these tasks in contrast to the approximately 16% spent on defense. However, in recent years the State Department's responsibilities have expanded enormously to include combating threats from terrorism, international crime, and narcotics trafficking.
- The American Legion vigorously supports funding for the United States Department of State in order that it can maintain a credible initial deterrent to international threats to the United States and effectively promote American interests abroad.

Issue: Expand Foreign Service Officer Corps

Message Points:

- The American Legion urges the President, Congress, and the Department of State to significantly increase the number of Foreign Service Officers in its ranks.
- That The American Legion urges the President, Congress, and the Department of State to implement a veterans' preference policy with the aim of recruiting more veterans into the Foreign Officer Corps whose experience may be an essential enhancement of the nation's diplomatic mission.