



THE AMERICAN LEGION  
*Veterans Strengthening America*

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

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Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed veterans, Legionnaires, and honored guests,

For more than a century now – 106 years to be precise – The American Legion has stood as a pillar of strength, service, and unwavering dedication to our nation's veterans. We serve not just those who wore the military uniform, but their families as well. We serve young people. We serve communities. And we continue to serve our great country.

Today, we not only celebrate the remarkable history of our American Legion but also reaffirm our commitment to the mission that has guided us since 1919.

Since its founding in the wake of World War I, The American Legion has been a steadfast advocate for those who have borne the weight of defending our freedoms.

At the first national convention of The American Legion, Thomas Miller of Delaware, stated the chief concern of the Committee of which he chaired. Quote: “The Legion’s interest in the treatment of disabled soldiers and the deplorable conditions existing in connection with this matter has received attention of the National Legislative Committee with a view to an early bettering of the conditions of disabled men,” -Unquote.

Chairman Miller and the Committee were justified in their concern.

The conditions to which our World War One veterans were exposed were as horrifying as any conflict that preceded it. Trench warfare, mustard gas and what was then called “shell shock” took an enormous toll on many of our dough boys.

It was American Legion advocacy that convinced the federal government to create the Veterans Bureau in 1921. Veterans would now have an agency responsible for administering health care, disability benefits and vocational training. The bureau would later evolve into the Veterans Administration and the cabinet-level system today known as the Department of Veterans Affairs.

It was The American Legion that drafted the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944— better known as “the GI Bill” — which is lauded by many historians as the greatest legislation ever passed by Congress. When the initial GI Bill period ended in 1956, 7.8 million out of 15.4 million veterans had enrolled in an education or training program. In 1955, the Veterans Administration backed one-third of housing starts. Levittown, New York, and many other communities owed their very existence to the affordable mortgages made possible by the GI Bill.

It has been estimated that the GI Bill returned \$7 to the economy for every \$1 of cost. Instead of another Great Depression, war veterans returned to a booming economy.

It was our American Legion that later funded studies, lobbied Congress and encouraged presidents to sign legislation delivering comprehensive benefits to veterans with conditions such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Lou Gehrig's disease and a host of illnesses linked to Agent Orange Exposure, burn pits, atomic radiation and other toxins connected to military service.

Throughout its history, The American Legion has been a champion for the youth of this nation, evident in its creation of programs such as Boys State, Oratorical Contests, Junior Shooting Sports, and The American Legion Legacy Scholarship.

Our Veterans & Children Foundation provides vital support for military and veteran parents in unexpected financial crises, as well as funding to train service officers so they can obtain care, benefits and opportunities for disabled vets and their families. Last year, American Legion service officers obtained a record 21 billion dollars in benefits for veterans, free of charge and regardless of membership in our organization.

We will always stand for a strong national defense because we believe superior firepower, training and planning will not only deter would-be adversaries but ultimately save American lives if war does occur.

From respecting the flag of our country to instilling patriotic values in our youth, the Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion calls on us to “foster and perpetuate a one hundred percent Americanism.”

This doesn't mean we believe that America is perfect. It simply is a re-affirmation of the oath that we once took to support and defend our constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

We know that our work continues, our commitment continues, and our passion continues. The challenges faced by veterans today—homelessness, mental health crises, and access to quality healthcare—remain at the heart of our mission.

More than 6,000 veterans take their own lives every year. The American Legion is committed to stopping these tragedies. We call on all American Legion Family members to “Be the One,” to assist veterans. Through a simple buddy-check, we can reach out to veterans who may or may not be struggling. We can listen when they wish to talk. The American Legion offers training on its website: [BeTheOne.ORG](http://BeTheOne.ORG) and encourages posts to conduct frequent buddy check efforts.

Most of all, if you are a struggling veteran or know a struggling veteran, call the 9-8-8 emergency crisis line. That’s 9-8-8, extension 1 for veteran. Isolation and loneliness are contributing factors in veteran suicide. By expanding the camaraderie and peer support that naturally occur in more than 12,000 posts around the globe, The American Legion can remain leader in veteran suicide prevention.



We must continue to adapt, lead and serve with the same passion that our founders demonstrated 106 years ago. We must ensure that every veteran, from every era of service, knows that they are not alone—that The American Legion will always be their home and that they have a family, an American Legion Family.

This milestone is a testament to the strength of our Legion family—our members, our Auxiliary, our Sons of The American Legion, and our American Legion Riders. Each of you, through your selfless service, upholds the values of duty, honor, and country. It is because of you that The American Legion remains a beacon of hope and support for those who have served.

As we celebrate today, let us remember our past, honor our present, and boldly face our future. We must follow a path for growth by welcoming new generations of veterans into our ranks and advocating for those who have given so much in defense of our nation. Together, we will ensure that The American Legion remains as strong in the next century as it has been for the past 106 years.

Thank you, and may God bless The American Legion, our veterans and the United States of America.