



THE AMERICAN LEGION
Veterans Strengthening America

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

PO BOX 1055, INDIANAPOLIS, IN, 46206-1055 • WWW.LEGION.ORG • P: (317) 630-1350 • F: (317) 630-1223

The American Legion
107th Birthday
March 15-17, 2026

The American Legion
Media & Communications Division

One hundred and seven years ago, the world was recovering from its bloodiest war in history. Woodrow Wilson was president of the United States. Europe was in shambles. And a group of U.S. veterans serving in Paris, France, was forming the organization that we are celebrating today.

But even before the official founding of The American Legion, there was a post that was already organizing its structure. Post 1 of this still unnamed veterans organization would be located in the nation's capital and eventually carry the name of America's first commander-in-chief, George Washington.

It's important to remember the "first," because that in a sense is a core principle of The American Legion, "service first."

Service in our military. Service to our country. Service to our communities. Service to our families. And service to each other. These things come before self.

“Service first” was the ethos of the Post 1 namesake. Continental Army officer Harry “Lighthorse” Lee remembered George Washington as – quote - "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen, he was second to none in the humble and endearing scenes of private life". – unquote.

This eulogy could also easily describe Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., one of the principal founders of The American Legion.

It was Roosevelt, Jr., who said, “we’ll start the war from here,” moments after he became the oldest soldier to storm the beachhead at Normandy.

And it was The American Legion that ensured returning World War II veterans would have unprecedented educational and home ownership opportunities through its creation of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944.

As impressive as our history is, The American Legion does not let past accomplishments define us. We are about advocacy for veterans. We are about patriotic citizenship. We are about creating opportunities for young people. And we still practice “service first.”

It is The American Legion’s corps of accredited service officers who obtained more than \$23 billion in benefits to veterans last year. It is The American Legion Child Well-being Foundation that awarded nearly \$853,000 in grants in 2025. And it is The American Legion that has delivered more than \$11 million in assistance to disaster victims since the creation of our National Emergency Fund.

The founders of The American Legion faced uncertainty about the future of our nation’s war veterans with a shared sense of purpose.

What began as a brotherhood and sisterhood of veterans grew into a national force for good. A force that was dedicated to advocacy, to safeguarding the freedoms we cherish, and to building a brighter future for those who carry the flag forward.

At about the time that The American Legion formed at the Paris Caucus in 1919, more than 300,000 soldiers with debilitating physical and mental disabilities were transitioning back to the United States. Having put unprecedented financial resources toward winning the war, the government paid little attention to the medical needs and rehabilitation of wounded veterans.

Even worse, some lawmakers questioned the moral fiber of disabled veterans who were seeking compensation and care.

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 Teddy Junior’s father, President Theodore Roosevelt, promised all Americans more than a decade earlier.

As the Legion was formed, Roosevelt 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.

Through the Legion’s hard work and advocacy, The U.S. Veterans Bureau was created in 1921. It would serve as the forerunner of the Veterans Administration and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Since 1919, The American Legion has led the charge for veterans health care and rehabilitation, patriotic youth programs, a strong national defense, and 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 (Comley), 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 literally rejuvenated the American economy.

We take pride in knowing that The American Legion is still leading the way. As decades passed after the signing of the original GI Bill, the public's memory receded and veterans had seen their educational benefits diminish.

Once again, The American Legion would answer the call by championing the rights of Global War on Terrorism veterans with a GI Bill that was even more comprehensive than the original.

The American Legion has thrived for 107 years because, while our organization continues to preserve the memories of those who have made great sacrifice, we 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 League Baseball Hall of Fame, where many of the greatest ballplayers in the world can be counted as veterans of American Legion Baseball.

It can be seen in the halls of Congress, governors' mansions, or business communities, where some of the most successful leaders are graduates of American Legion Boys State and Boys Nation. Their accomplishments are mirrored by women who have graduated from American Legion Auxiliary Girls State and Girls Nation programs.

Greatness can be seen in marksmanship competitions, where some of the top champions first honed their skills in The American Legion Junior Shooting Sports Program.

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 also believe that peace can only be achieved through strength. Nobody hates war more than the warrior, but we also believe that some things are worth fighting for.

We honor the principle espoused by America's first president when he said in his first annual address to Congress, quote – "To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace. " -unquote.

For the past 107 years, the men and women of The American Legion have been 100 percent committed to preserving the peace that George Washington sought.

With your help and the service of future generations of Legionnaires, America will still represent the world's greatest hope and put service before self.

Thank you, God Bless America, and God Bless The American Legion.

-#####-