



OUR PILLARS, YOUR PLATFORM

2012 Election Issues that Matter Most to the Nation's Largest Organization of Wartime Veterans

An American Legion Special Report



PREAMBLE

TO THE AMERICAN LEGION CONSTITUTION

FOR GOD AND COUNTRY WE ASSOCIATE OURSELVES
TOGETHER FOR THE FOLLOWING PURPOSES:

To uphold and defend the Constitution
of the United States of America

To maintain law and order

To foster and perpetuate a
one hundred percent Americanism

To preserve the memories and incidents
of our associations in the Great Wars

To inculcate a sense of individual obligation
to the community, state and nation

To combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses

To make right the master of might
To promote 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.



A MESSAGE FROM THE LEGION

The national elections of 2012 come at a critical time for the United States, its veterans and citizens. The American Legion was formed for times like these.

As our servicemen and women return from Iraq and Afghanistan, they are met with daunting challenges at home. These soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines are greeted by a dismal economy. They need jobs, business opportunities or education pathways that can propel them from military service to prosperous careers. They face these external challenges while making profound internal adjustments. At home, life no longer includes roadside bombs or rocket-propelled grenades. For



Ken Governor
Legislative Commission
Chairman

many, the adjustment will be difficult. Some will bear the scars of war, visible or invisible, for the rest of their lives.

It is imperative that we provide them compassionate, efficient and easily accessible health care. Because of their sacrifices on behalf of our nation, they have unique health-care needs, they qualify for benefits they earned and deserve, and our nation has a sacred obligation to help them.

Sadly, veterans are discovering the line for VA benefits is more than 900,000 applications long. These delayed case decisions affect those from the Greatest Generation to the current generation. Veterans who live in rural parts of the United States must travel hundreds of miles to see doctors, care for female veterans is only now beginning to match that of male veterans, and waiting times to see VA specialists are intolerably long in many parts of the country.

The Legion stands with VA in the mission to "care for him who has borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan." This means health care, timely decisions on claims, education, career opportunities, home loans and survivor benefits. The Legion works daily on behalf of veterans, military personnel and communities. Often, it takes patience, as with the passage last summer of the Veteran Skills to Jobs Act, which the Legion pushed for years. Sometimes, it takes agility, in the form of National Emergency Fund disaster relief for communities, or Temporary Financial Assistance for struggling military families with minor children.

Beyond these challenges, there are daily reminders that America's morals and cultural values are under siege. Activists aim to distort and twist the core values of patriotism, morality and religion that gave birth to our nation, under God. They aim to kick God out of our public squares, deem the destruction of the U.S. Flag an acceptable form of free speech and put political correctness ahead of moral integrity.

Legionnaires support legal immigration and oppose illegal border crossings for reasons ranging from economic impact on veterans to national security.

The American Legion, since its inception in 1919, has remained committed to four key pillars of advocacy and support: **Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation; National Security; Americanism and Children & Youth.**

This report, "Our Pillars, Your Platform," is for election incumbents and challengers alike, voters and others who wish to learn more about The American Legion's positions on key national issues. As the largest organization of wartime veterans, the Legion's voice is representative of more than 4 million veterans and patriotic Americans. These positions are guided by nearly 100 years of consistent advocacy and resolutions from the grassroots of the organization, local American Legion posts and veterans in every congressional district of America. This is a constituency that lobbies with principles, not pocketbooks, to improve our nation, which they have proven is worth fighting for.

For God and Country,

THE FOUR PILLARS

I. Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

- Access to VA Care
- Improved Claims Processing
- Better Funding Formula
- Support for Veterans with Special Needs
- Civilian Opportunities
- Education Benefits
- Employment and Business
- Eradication of Veteran Homelessness
- Proper Veteran Cemeteries

II. National Security

- The Global War on Terrorism
- Strong National Defense
- Protection of Defense Budget
- Military Quality of Life
- Homeland Security
- Foreign Affairs
- Full Accounting of POW/MIAs
- Illegal Immigration Enforcement
- Heroes to Hometowns

III. Americanism

- Flag Protection
- Citizenship
- Boy Scouts
- The Pledge of Allegiance
- Patriotic Holidays and Observances

IV. Children & Youth

- Child Pornography
- Catastrophic Illness
- Family Integrity
- Media Violence
- Drug Abuse
- Child Advocacy in Legal Issues



PILLAR 1: VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION



Loren Holmes

SYSTEM WORTH SAVING

The American Legion's primary health-care evaluation tool is the System Worth Saving (SWS) program. The mission of SWS is to assess the quality and timeliness of veterans health care, and to collect feedback from veterans on their level of care. Every six months, the SWS task force conducts 20 to 30 site visits to VA medical centers, focusing on one primary health-care issue, such as the quality of health care for veterans in rural areas. The Legion believes the program clearly identifies unique demands facing the VA health care system, as it continues to meet the obligations that President Abraham Lincoln spoke of in his second inaugural address: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan."

www.legion.org/systemworthsaving

For more than 90 years, the Legion has been the nation's leading advocate for proper health care and earned benefits for America's veterans. The Legion was instrumental in creating the Veterans Administration in 1930, and an ardent supporter of its rise to Cabinet status when it became the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in 1989. As the relationship between VA and veterans evolves, the Legion will help VA meet its critical mission.

As it has for decades, the Legion continues to aggressively lobby for adequate funding of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), to provide timely access to quality health care. Additionally, the Legion seeks to ensure fair rulings on claims and other earned veterans benefits for those who have service-connected injuries and illnesses. A nationwide network of more than 2,500 American Legion accredited service officers and other professional staff works diligently to assist veterans in obtaining the benefits and care they have earned and deserve through VHA, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and the National Cemetery Administration.

Today, as the number of discharged veterans from operations Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Enduring Freedom (OEF) and New Dawn (OND) surpasses 1.2 million, the Legion's congressionally chartered role to support them could not be more relevant. However, the Legion also strongly believes that a veteran is a veteran, regardless of war era or location of service. In this way, the Legion is the only organization that works on behalf of about 23 million U.S. veterans alive today.

The Legion has tens of thousands of members who volunteer nearly a million hours annually in VA facilities to help their fellow veterans navigate the VA system (saving the department about \$20 million per year).

The Legion stands on the front line of change for veterans through its pillar of service called Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation (VA&R). VA&R's top priorities are to:

Protect VA from Budget Reductions

Last year's failure of the congressional "supercommittee" means that automatic spending cuts, known as sequestration, are scheduled to take effect in January 2013, unless Congress finds other options for federal budget reductions. Although the Obama administration has said all programs administered by VA (including veterans' medical care) are exempt from sequestration, the Legion is concerned that VA's federal administrative expenses are not covered. This lapse has the potential to affect



the care that our veterans need and deserve. Hundreds of thousands of our men and women who served in Iraq and Afghanistan are now relying on VA for their health care, as are our older veterans. The administration and members of Congress must make sure that VA's entire budget is protected from the effects of sequestration.

Boost VA Construction Projects

The Legion is profoundly disappointed that VA construction, both major and minor, is woefully underfunded. This failure to provide adequate, safe and up-to-date medical treatment facilities affects thousands of veterans. VA's Strategic Capital Investment Planning (SCIP) program has identified gaps in space, access, workload, safety, security, and other areas that can be fixed with construction projects, maintenance, enhanced-use leasing (EUL) or other methods.

When SCIP was launched, it identified 4,808 capital projects to be corrected over a 10-year period, costing between \$53 billion and \$65 billion. In its first year, the program was not adequately funded to correct deficiencies within the time allotted. Now - using estimates for current construction needs and maintenance - the Legion expects it will take VA 60 years to close construction gaps at current funding rates.

Additionally, VA is not able to engage in EULs because Congress did not reauthorize such privileges in November 2011. Without EULs, VA is unable to meet its construction needs or the Building Utilization Review and Repurposing (BURR) initiative. The BURR initiative was developed to meet the needs of homeless veterans. More than 100 properties were identified as potential locations for transitional housing.

The Legion backs a fully funded SCIP program, and reauthorization of the VA to engage in EULs, provided it follows a priority list set by Congress. This list can include homelessness, women veterans, mental health, geriatric care and adaptive sports.

Stop Denying VA Health Care

Veterans with certain demographic characteristics are now denied VA health care. The continued budget-driven suspension of Priority Group 8 veterans from new enrollment in the VA health-care system defies the spirit and intention of the Veterans Health Care Eligibility Reform Act of 1996. The Legion believes that any eligible veteran should be able to enroll in the VA health-care system.

Speed Up Delivery of Electronic Health Records

DoD and VA have multiple programs designed to help servicemembers transition to veteran status and receive their earned benefits. Of 1.2 million OEF/OIF/OND veterans who are eligible for VA health care, only about half are enrolled.

The Legion urges our nation's leadership to speed up implementation of the Integrated Electronic Health Record (iEHR), currently scheduled for completion by 2017. Failure to implement iEHR has caused significant delays in veterans' transition because VA treatment teams do not have full access to DoD health records. The Legion also advocates for the dissemination of VA benefits information at all military transition and access points, including Transition Assistance Program (TAP) briefings.

Reduce Delays in Integrated Disability Evaluation System

The Legion has a Medical Evaluation Board/Physical Evaluation Board (MEB/PEB) coordinator on staff, responsible for assisting servicemembers at Washington, D.C., military installations. The Legion also has MEB/PEB representatives at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, and Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., who are supervised by the MEB/PEB coordinator.

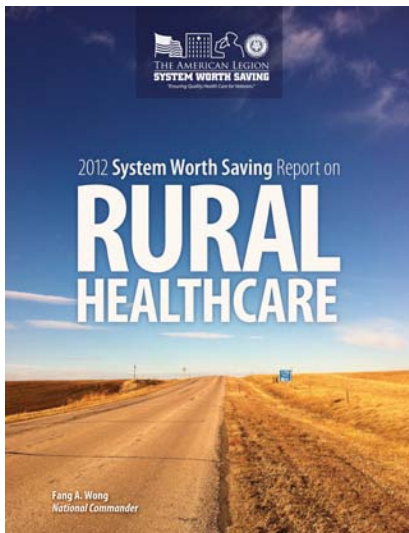
As of January 2012, about 24,000 servicemembers were participating in the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) across all branches of service, including National Guard and reserve units. The Legion provides appeal assistance to servicemembers through all phases of the IDES process, including representation at formal hearing boards.



TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY AND POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

American servicemembers are returning home in unprecedented numbers with varying levels of traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Within the military and veterans communities, there is a growing concern about the best practices and types of treatment that are being used. In response, The American Legion approved Resolution 13 in October 2010 for the creation of an ad hoc committee on TBI and PTSD.

The ad hoc committee was created "to investigate the existing science and procedures, as well as alternative methods, for treating TBI and PTSD not currently being employed by the Department of Defense or Department of Veterans Affairs, for the purpose of determining if such alternative treatments are practical and efficacious." The committee has held six meetings since its inception, receiving several presentations from leading DoD and VA clinicians on research and treatments, and hearing from veterans about their own personal experiences with TBI and PTSD. The ad hoc committee's final report should be available this fall; its findings and recommendations will be presented to the administration, members of Congress and DoD/VA senior leadership.



REGIONAL OFFICE ACTION REVIEW

The American Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation (VA&R) Division operates the Regional Office Action Review (ROAR) program, conducting about eight site visits per year to VA regional offices. The purpose of the ROAR visits is to evaluate the quality of disability claims processing at each office, identify strengths and challenges, brief VA staff on findings, and recommend specific strategies for improvement. This is a key initiative, stemming from the incredible backlog of cases – more than 900,000 – that frequently delays treatment.

During the visits, ROAR teams review about 50 disability claims, meet with key staff members and interview random VA employees about staffing, training and workload. The ROAR teams look specifically at claims to see how they were handled and whether the information was accurately recorded.

The ROAR team provides a brief synopsis for each claim that is reviewed, indicating which areas the regional office is excelling in, and identifying areas for improvement.

Currently, it takes servicemembers an average of 374 days to process through the IDES program. The Legion recommends that:

- DoD adheres to VA ratings, rather than using them only as guidelines.
- The program is implemented uniformly across services and geographic regions.
- A clear and concise explanation of the IDES program is provided to the service-member and immediate family upon consideration of a medical evaluation board.
- The Physical Evaluation Board Liaison strictly adheres to the scope of responsibilities.
- Caregivers of seriously ill or injured servicemembers/veterans are provided single points of contact for any assistance regarding the patient's health and welfare.

Improve Access to Health Care in Rural Areas

From October 2011 to March 2012, The American Legion's System Worth Saving (SWS) Task Force conducted a series of visits to VA medical centers, to evaluate the challenges veterans living in rural areas face with their VA health care. Two major concerns are VA's definition of "rural veteran," and its transportation network, which assists veterans traveling to and from medical appointments.

First, VA currently uses the Census Bureau's definition of "rural", which means, for instance, that if a veteran lives in a rural area but also lives close to a VA medical facility, then he or she is not considered a rural veteran. VA's current definition does not take travel time and distance into consideration. This is problematic because many veterans are incapable of driving long distances; nor do they have proper transportation to navigate the rough terrain in rural areas.

The Legion recommends that VA broaden the Census Bureau's definition to incorporate access and driving times to its facilities. Using this new definition would assist in understanding the needs of a newly structured Veterans Transportation Network.

Secondly, in highly rural areas, many veterans live hours away from their local VA facilities; therefore, voluntary transportation has been a key component in rural health care. Currently, most VA medical centers offer volunteer transportation services, which can be unreliable.

The Legion recommends that VA medical centers implement a Veterans Transportation Department. Under this plan, drivers would be paid employees (in addition to volunteers). Such a program could ensure not only reliable transportation, but also create incentives and jobs for drivers. The full SWS Rural Health Care Report is available at www.legion.org.

Address Environmental Exposure Issues

Servicemembers have often been afflicted with illnesses related to environmental exposure, which may be caused by direct contact, testing, storage, or transportation of toxic materials, such as dioxins located in herbicides or the burn pits in Afghanistan, Iraq and even stateside. These hazards lead to lifelong complications and can even be passed on to future generations. (For example, spina bifida has been linked to Agent Orange exposure.) The American Legion urges VA to include the C-123K Provider military transport used in the Vietnam War on its presumptive list for Agent Orange locations. Additionally, the Legion wants DoD to disclose all locations of environmental hazards so that research can be conducted on the effects to servicemembers. These sites would also include stateside facilities that eliminate, test or store contaminants. The Legion also wants to extend indefinitely the presumptive period for Gulf War illnesses due to the unknown effects of service in current conflicts.

Increase Staffing Levels to Reduce VA Claims Backlog

One of VA's most difficult challenges is providing quality decisions in a timely manner as the number of cases increases. The veteran population in fiscal year 2011 was about 22.7 million, with more than 3.3 million receiving disability compensation benefits. In the majority of those cases, the claims processed by VBA's



56 regional offices involve multiple issues that are legally and medically complex, and time-consuming to adjudicate.

As of May 25, 2012, there were 904,624 claims pending in VBA; of those, 869,083 were claims pending for compensation and pension, and 563,457 (64.8 percent) were in backlog, pending for more than 125 days. There were also 255,925 appeals pending at VA regional offices. As of March 2012, the average number of days to complete a claim from date of receipt was 240.7 days (in contrast, VA's goal is 80 days).

There has been a steady increase in VA's pending claims backlog since FY 2008, when there were 397,000. At the end of FY 2009, there were more than 563,000 rating cases pending, which increased to about 849,000 in FY 2011.

As of March 2012, VA's accuracy of rating claims averaged 86.1 percent. The reported accuracy for rating claims in a three-month period averaged 87 percent, but falls to 65.8 percent accuracy for claims pending more than 125 days. Inadequate staffing levels, lack of continuing education and increased pressure to make quick decisions result in an overall decrease in the quality of work. These are among the most common complaints raised by VA employees interviewed by Legion staff during regional office quality checks.

It is an extreme disservice to veterans, not to mention unrealistic, to expect VA to continue to process an ever-increasing workload, yet still maintain quality and timeliness with current staff levels. VA has an excellent opportunity to seek re-turning veterans, especially those with service-connected disabilities, for employment opportunities within VBA. Despite recent hiring initiatives, regional offices will need more personnel, given current and projected workload demands.

Expand Veterans Treatment Courts

Some veterans are not accessing quality health care after combat and are at risk of entering the criminal justice system, where they could face charges stemming from medical issues. Veterans treatment courts, similar to drug and mental-health courts, were developed in 2008 to help veterans avoid incarceration or establishing a criminal record. They ensure that veterans who have entered the criminal justice system receive specific federal, state and county benefits to help in their rehabilitation. However, if a veteran fails to comply with the treatment plan, the original sentence is reinstated.

Today, there are more than 90 veteran treatment courts established across the country, with more added every month. The Legion urges Congress to continue to fund the establishment and expansion of these courts. The Legion also urges VHA and VBA to participate in these courts. VA representatives would be working alongside more than 2,500 American Legion service officers to help veterans gain access to health care and file for their benefits.

Increase Funding for National Cemetery Administration

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) is currently made up of 131 cemeteries. According to an independent survey, NCA ranked first for performance among government and private entities four consecutive times in the last 10 years. NCA's best practices should be replicated across other federal agencies.

NCA has a plan to address the decreasing space available at current cemeteries due to the number of World War II, Korean War and Vietnam War veterans who are passing away. NCA also intends to expand into new locations, so that families will not have to drive more than 75 miles to visit their loved ones. To do so, the Legion urges Congress to fully fund NCA at \$250 million for major and minor construction at the national and state cemetery levels. This amount would give NCA the financial support necessary to make all adjustments and meet future demands.

Also, the Legion is concerned with the eligibility and monetary awards for the burial plot allowance. The Legion urges Congress to support a bill to return the burial plot allowance to all veterans who served during a time of war or conflict.

THE LEGION'S NETWORK OF SERVICE OFFICERS

The American Legion maintains an extensive network of more than 2,500 professionally accredited department service officers, who are officially recognized by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide representation and assistance to veterans and their dependents. Their services are provided free of charge, regardless of whether a veteran belongs to the Legion. Service officers are located in all 56 VA Regional Offices and in many counties across the country. (Veterans can search for nearby DSOs by going to www.legion.org.)

The Legion also maintains fully staffed offices of professional appeals representatives at VA's Board of Veterans' Appeals and at the Appeals Management Center. National appeals representatives at these offices provide direct representation to veterans and survivors whose claims are initially denied by regional offices.

The Legion also works with the National Veterans Legal Services Program, a non-profit law firm and consultant to the Legion, and the Veterans Consortium to ensure that Legion-represented claims denied by the BVA have access to the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.

The American Legion National Headquarters conducts a rigorous schedule of training and accreditation for service officers, including two training schools a year, the distribution of numerous bulletins and other documents, along with other forms of direct training and support at the state and local levels.



AN EMPHASIS ON JOBS AND EDUCATION



Sarah Thiora

CAREER FAIRS

The American Legion has been working with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce on an initiative to reduce unemployment among veterans. By pooling resources with the Department of Labor, Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) and various corporate sponsors, the Legion is hosting more than 200 veteran-specific job fairs across the nation in 2012 and 2013.

The "Hiring our Heroes" program focuses on smaller but more frequent career fairs in under-served rural or previously inaccessible sections of the country. This program takes advantage of the large footprint American Legion posts have throughout the nation, including many in rural areas that are ideal venues for these events.

Servicemen and women delay career advancements and college educations to serve our country. Often those same men and women return to civilian life as veterans with physical disabilities or personal problems and face daunting transitions back to the workforce or higher education. The American Legion's Economic Division, a major part of the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation pillar, works to improve the civilian lives of veterans in numerous ways, including support for:

Employment

The Legion continues to be a leading voice in the fight to improve employment opportunities for veterans and their families. The Legion understands that the private sector must be engaged, educated and encouraged to improve their hiring practices. The federal government must also continue to push its veterans-hiring initiatives to achieve meaningful results at all levels. In addition, the executive branch must direct effective improvements in hiring practices at all federal agencies. The legislative branch must continue its efforts to improve laws that significantly affect veteran employment, while providing adequate funding for employment programs and services that assist veterans and their families in obtaining gainful employment.

Veterans Employment And Training Service (VETS)

The Department of Labor's VETS program offers employment and training services to eligible veterans through its Jobs for Veterans state grants program. The mission of VETS is to

promote the economic security of America's veterans. The Legion is eager to see this program grow, and would like to see greater expansion of entrepreneurial, self-employment opportunity training. Such services will continue to be crucial as today's active-duty servicemembers, especially those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, transition into the civilian workforce. Adequate funding will allow the programs to increase staffing to provide comprehensive case-management job assistance to disabled and other eligible veterans. For the VETS program to assist these veterans to achieve their goals, it needs to:

- Implement recent reforms to the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), so that veterans can be better informed on education, employment and business opportunities as they transition into the civilian workforce.
- Expand outreach efforts with creative initiatives designed to improve employment and training services for veterans.
- Provide information on identifying military occupations that provide qualifying training for required licenses, certificates or other credentials at the local, state, or national levels.
- Eliminate barriers to recently separated servicemembers, and assist in the transition from military service to the civilian labor market.

The Legion believes staffing levels for the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) and Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVER) should match the needs of the veterans community in each state and should

not be based solely on the fiscal needs of the state government. Therefore, the Legion believes that VETS should remain a national program with federal oversight and accountability. Additionally, the Legion seeks legislation that will transfer all DVOPs and LVERs from the state agencies to VETS for supervision and oversight to ensure that the individuals employed to serve veterans are not used for other programs.

Work Opportunity Tax Credits

One measure that has provided incentives for bringing veterans into the civilian workforce is the use of tax credits for businesses that hire veterans. The Legion continues its support for Work Opportunity Tax Credits provided to employers under the VOW ACT of 2011.

Keystone XL Pipeline

The Keystone XL pipeline is the proposed 1,661-mile expansion of the existing Keystone pipeline system, running from Canada through the midwestern and southern United States. While the current pipeline has terminus points in Patoka, Ill., and Cushing, Okla., the proposed extension would lay new pipe from Hardisty, Canada, to Steele City, Kan., and from Cushing to Port Arthur, Texas, and Houston.

The United States consumes 19 million barrels of oil every day and imports more than 12 million barrels per day. Consequently, a secure supply of crude oil from our ally in Canada, rather than reliance on imported oil from more volatile parts of the world, is critical to our national energy security. More importantly, Canada has indicated that if it cannot build a pipeline to sell its crude oil to the United States, it would build a pipeline westward to export oil to China. Thus, construction of this pipeline is of vital importance to our national security.

The Legion is concerned about the thousands of American veterans from past conflicts, as well as Iraq and Afghanistan, who are currently unemployed. The Keystone XL pipeline will provide jobs for veterans. TransCanada, the company behind the project, estimates that, once the United States regulatory review process is concluded, it could put 13,000 Americans to work. Pipe fitters, welders, mechanics, electricians, heavy equipment operators and other types of skilled labor would be employed on the pipeline. Additionally, about 7,000 manufacturing jobs would be created across the country. Furthermore, local businesses along



Sarah Tilotta

the pipeline's path would benefit from about 118,000 jobs the pipeline will create through increased business for local goods and services.

The Keystone pipeline system will play an important role in linking a secure supply of Canadian crude oil to U.S. refining markets, significantly improving the North American oil energy supply and generating thousands of jobs for Americans. The Legion believes this project must be approved now and supports legislative efforts to get construction started.

Education

Since the Post-9/11 GI Bill went into effect in August 2009, there has been dramatic growth in the number of beneficiaries and benefits payments for study at post-secondary institutions. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) supports more than 800,000 students through its education benefits programs, and the Department of Defense (DoD) assisted nearly 400,000 through its Tuition Assistance Program.

Increasing scrutiny of post-secondary institutions from veteran service organizations and

lawmakers focused on unsatisfactory veteran graduation rates, recruiting practices, transferability of credits and lack of accountability.

Lawmakers should recognize the need to educate prospective student-veterans and their families on what to look for when choosing a college or university. Policymakers should also review and readdress the creation of relevant and useful data collection points in the federal Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) when the law is reviewed for reauthorization.

The GI Bill is an important investment which, if squandered due to unscrupulous practices on the part of some institutions of higher learning, could leave servicemembers, veterans and their families with diminished hopes of obtaining gainful employment once they leave the military. There is a significant gap between the promise and delivery of higher education, which, unless bridged, will constrain our economic growth and squander one of this nation's greatest assets - America's servicemembers, veterans and their families.





Tom Strattman

Small Business

The American Legion views small business as the backbone of the American economy. Small business owners are the mobilizing force behind America's past economic growth, and will continue to be a major factor as we move through the current economic slowdown. There are 27 million small businesses in the country, accounting for 99.7 percent of all firms. Reports show that businesses with fewer than 20 employees represent 90 percent of all U.S. firms and are responsible for more than 75 percent of all new jobs. Small businesses generated \$993 billion in income in 2006, and employed 58.6 million people.

To help ease the credit crisis for small businesses, the Legion urges Congress to establish a direct lending program through the Small Business Administration (SBA). This effort would offer low-interest loans to otherwise healthy veteran-owned and service-disabled veteran-owned businesses that are having trouble obtaining the credit they need for necessary operating expenses or expansion. In addition, the Legion seeks and supports legislation to require a 5 percent goal, with set-asides and sole-source authority for federal procurements and contracts for businesses owned and operated by service-disabled veterans and businesses owned by veterans. This includes small businesses owned by reservists and National Guard members who have been or may be called to active duty, or may be affected by base closings and other military reductions.

The Legion notes that pressures being exerted on the federal contracting community will likely result in greater use of the General

Services Administration's Federal Supply Schedule Program. While this program holds a higher contracting preference compared to the small-business programs, it unfortunately does not allow set-asides for any small business group. The Legion believes that expanded use of this program will further diminish opportunities for small businesses, especially those owned by veterans. The Legion recommends that:

- Service-disabled, veteran-owned small business (SDVOSB) set-asides should be allowed under the Federal Supply Schedule Program. Without this change, SDVOSBs are limited in their quest for small business opportunities to compete for federal contracts.
- Implementation of a coordinated, standardized training program for procurement staff that focuses on SDVOSB procurement strategies in their respective agency.
- The president should reissue Executive Order 13-360 "Providing Opportunities for Service-Disabled Veteran Businesses" to increase federal contracting and subcontracting opportunities for veterans, and require that its tenets be incorporated into SBA regulations and standard operating procedures.
- SBA needs to emphasize Executive Order 13-360 and establish it as a procurement priority across the federal sector. Federal agencies need to be held accountable by SBA for implementing the executive order, and SBA needs to establish a means to monitor agencies' progress and, where appropriate, establish reports to identify those that are not in compliance, and pursue ongoing follow-up.



- To achieve the mandates of Executive Order 13-360, SBA must assist federal agencies to develop a strategic plan that is quantifiable, and will assist them in establishing realistic reporting criteria.
- The House Small Business Committee should embrace and promote development of stronger policy and legislative language that champions the use of veteran-owned small business joint-venturing as a ready solution to the small business spending requirements of the stimulus spending initiative.
- Hold the leadership of federal agencies responsible for meeting the congressionally mandated goal of assigning annually 3 percent of federal contracting dollars to SDVOSBs. We recommend the committee schedule a hearing with all federal agencies that consistently do not meet their federal procurement goals with SDVOSBs.

Veterans Homelessness

To fully implement VA's pledge to end homelessness among veterans by 2015, Congress must continue making responsible investments in affordable housing and supportive services programs that move veterans and their families off the streets and into stable housing.

VA's homeless assistance programs are intended to serve all groups of low-income veterans: those who are at risk of becoming homeless or being homeless for a short time, and those with families who have spent years without a place to call home. To make this seamless system of care work, The American Legion recommends that funding be provided for a broad range of suitable and effective interventions, including:



- Congress should appropriate additional funds for the Supportive Services for Veteran Families program (SSVF). SSVF funds have been used effectively by community organizations to prevent many veterans from becoming homeless, and to quickly re-house veterans who only need short-term rental assistance and limited case management to get back on their feet. SSVF funds can also be used to pay for employment services, utility assistance, child-care costs and other housing-related expenses.
- Congress should continue its support for the Homeless Veterans Grant and Per Diem transitional housing program. This critical program provides short-term housing assistance to homeless veterans, allowing them to get connected with jobs, supportive

services, more permanent housing, and ultimately to become self-sufficient. Promising new models for using grant and per diem (GPD) funds, including allowing veterans to remain in their GPD housing units after support from the program ends, and new programs focused on women veterans. These models are helping to ensure that GPD continues to meet the changing needs of returning veterans and their families.

- Congress should provide 10,000 new HUD-VASH vouchers designed to serve homeless veterans - and, in many cases, their families - who will need long-term housing coupled with intensive case management and supportive services. Since 2008, a total of 37,975 vouchers have been awarded, contributing

substantially to major reductions in veterans homelessness.

The American Legion continues to take on a leadership role within local communities through volunteering, fundraising, and advocating for programs and funding for homeless veterans. In addition, the Legion has provided housing for homeless veterans and their families (for example, in the Legion departments of Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Connecticut). One of the Legion's goals is to help bring federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, faith-based institutions and other stakeholders to the table to discuss best practices and funding opportunities for homeless veterans. They and their families need to obtain necessary care and help to properly transition from streets and shelters to gainful employment and independent living.

CREDENTIALING BOOSTS JOB PROSPECTS

The Department of Defense provides some of the best vocational training in the country for military personnel. Many occupational career fields in the armed forces easily translate into the civilian workforce. However, there are many civilian occupations that require licenses or certification. Every year, skilled servicemembers leaving active duty miss out on the chance to quickly move into good, high-paying, career-building jobs because they must undergo lengthy and expensive retraining to meet civilian licensing and certification requirements. Often, such retraining is for the same type of jobs they held in the military. This situation forces veterans into under-employment, hampers businesses because skilled workers are unavailable, and stunts the economy due to delayed job creation and limited consumer spending.

Since the release of The American Legion's landmark 1997 study on civilian licensure and certification for veterans, the organization has consistently distinguished itself as a respected and thoughtful voice for improving the employment prospects of veterans through better understanding and use of professional certification. These efforts are finally paying off. In the last few years, there has been a major culture shift in the military, which once believed that making it easier for troops to get jobs in the private sector would reduce retention and hurt the armed forces. Now, an expanded credentialing program has widespread support on Capitol Hill and from many top defense officials.

For example, Congress passed the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 that requires the Department of Labor to take a hard look at how to translate military skills and training to private-sector jobs, and will work to make it easier to get the licenses and certifications our veterans need. Congress also passed the Veteran Skills to Jobs Act of 2012, which directs the head of each federal department and agency to treat relevant military training as sufficient to satisfy training or certification requirements for federal licenses. The Department of Defense has established a Military Credential-

ing and Licensing Task Force. This group will focus its initial efforts on industries that need more skilled workers and stand to benefit from military expertise and training, including manufacturing, first responders, health care, information technology, transportation and logistics. Within one year, the task force is expected to (1) identify military specialties that readily transfer to high-demand jobs; (2) work with civilian credentialing and licensing associations to address gaps between military training programs and credentialing or licensing requirements; and (3) provide servicemembers with greater access to certification and licensing exams.

The federal government plays only a limited role in the certification and licensing arena. The private sector and state/local governments play a much larger role, issuing worker credentials that affect far more occupations and workers than federal agencies. To make the largest impact possible for veterans, all parties involved in credentialing must be included - not only federal and state governments, and all branches of the military, but the business community, technical schools, community colleges and professional, business and association certifying entities.

Nevertheless, the federal government is uniquely situated and obligated to take the lead on this issue, not only to overcome outdated attitudes, but to set an example for state and local government agencies that grant occupational licenses and set certain professional standards.

Done properly, these initiatives will help ensure that specialized military training received by our men and women in uniform meets civilian standards for credentialing and licensing. This will save money for the federal government and give the private sector a fully qualified, job-ready workforce. The American Legion encourages initiatives that build upon and accelerate efforts to put returning veterans to work, using skills developed in the military, and stands ready to assist all parties to succeed in this process.



BETTER SERVICES FOR FEMALE VETERANS



The concerns of female veterans have always been a high priority for The American Legion. And now that women are forced into combat roles in areas that lack clearly defined battle lines, they are returning home with the same injuries and wounds as male veterans - yet they have unique concerns about how the existing VA health-care system is adapting to their needs.

These women are bringing home challenges requiring gender-specific expertise and care. According to a 2011 analysis by researchers Paula Schnurr and Carole Lunney, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is especially prevalent among women. For example, 10.2 percent of women who used VA facilities in 2009 were diagnosed with PTSD, compared with only 7.8 percent of men.

Overall, of the 1.8 million female veterans in America, about 337,000 are enrolled in the VA health-care system. The proportion of female VA enrollees, according to the Department of Health and Human Services, is expected to increase this decade until one in every 12 will be female.

Currently, 44 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan female veterans have enrolled in the VA system. As this segment of the veterans population continues to expand, it has become increasingly clear that the

concerns of women require further analysis to ensure their needs are met in the same manner their male counterparts have already come to expect.

In January 2011, The American Legion launched a landmark survey to gauge the health-care concerns of women veterans to determine whether the VA was meeting their needs. The study surveyed 3,012 female veterans to better understand their health-care needs. The survey consisted of 67 questions, designed to measure the following 10 attributes of service quality: (1) tangibles, (2) reliability, (3) responsiveness, (4) competence, (5) courtesy, (6) communication, (7) credibility, (8) security, (9) access, and (10) understanding/knowing the customer. The survey found widespread dissatisfaction in health-care services among women veterans.

Only 42 percent of respondents were satisfied with the screening process for military sexual trauma (MST). This is particularly troubling when some sources report that one in three women on active duty is likely to have experienced some level of MST. One study reported that distress associated with sexual trauma among female veterans was four times more likely than duty-related stress associated with PTSD. This startling concern merits

immediate attention. The American Legion recommends that VA conduct a comprehensive study of MST - in conjunction with the Department of Defense, if possible - to develop a better plan to counteract this widespread problem.

Other findings included:

- Almost 25 percent of the respondents rated the convenience of the location of VA facilities for women-specific issues as poor, indicating that gender-specific care is difficult to obtain for many female veterans.
- Almost 57 percent of respondents were satisfied with the reliability of health care provided by VA when compared to private health-care providers.
- More than three in 10 were dissatisfied when they compared the responsiveness of VA to that of private health-care providers. This is a theme that occurs throughout the survey results.
- Over 25 percent of respondents expressed a level of dissatisfaction for security, which suggests there is room for improvement, especially when it comes to a patient's personal information.
- Nearly one-third indicated they were dissatisfied with their most recent



DoD Photos

experiences with women veterans program managers, suggesting there is room for significant improvement in the capabilities of VA to provide gender-specific services.

VA needs to develop a comprehensive picture of women's health that extends beyond reproductive issues. Provider education needs improvement. Furthermore, as female veterans are often the sole caregivers in families, services and benefits designed to promote independent living for combat-injured veterans must be evaluated, and needs such as child care must be factored into the equation. Many female veterans cannot make appointments, due to the lack of child-care options available within VA medical centers. Since conducting the survey, the Legion has continued to advocate for improvements in the delivery of timely and high-quality health care for female veterans. During the System Worth Saving (SWS) site visits, task force members have asked medical staff at VA facilities about their women veterans programs and shared areas of concern. The American Legion will continue to make recommendations to the administration, Congress and VA on how women veterans programs can be more effectively

supported. One primary role of the Legion's female veterans outreach coordinator is to identify best practices and challenges, and work with Legion departments to establish coordinators at the state level.

While conducting the survey, the Legion was overwhelmed with responses from women who were grateful that someone had reached out to determine their needs. After years of being met with silence and indifference, they feel that someone is finally listening. The Legion urges VA, Congress and other interested parties to heed those words and refocus attention on the VA health-care needs of women.

The Women Veterans Outreach Program

The American Legion's Women Veterans Outreach Program was created as a direct result of the findings from a March 2011 Women Veterans Survey Report. The results of the survey, along with recent GAO reporting – even VA's own reporting – raised troubling questions about the department's understanding and treatment of female veterans in the VA health-care system, and led the Legion to increase its efforts to improve care for women who have served in uniform.

The Women Veterans Outreach Program is moving forward on a number of fronts. Initial efforts have focused on laying the groundwork for a viable and effective program. The Legion's platform is to educate, collaborate, and provide oversight; to educate veterans and the communities that support them; to collaborate with local, state and federal agencies that can provide needed services; and to provide continued oversight of VA's delivery of benefits and services. Legion advocacy efforts will ensure that the needs of female veterans are being met and, more importantly, that female veterans are informed about issues that can profoundly affect their lives.

Initial program implementation will include the placement of women veteran outreach coordinators at the state level. Many states already have such coordinators and vibrant programs, while others continue to develop their programs. Coordinators will be trained and educated in their responsibilities and given the necessary assistance to get their programs up and running.

The American Legion's continued focus on female veterans will ensure that our outreach program will be a model for others to follow.



A LEGACY OF AMERICAN LEGION SERVICE



At the conclusion of World War I, U.S. veterans returned home to parades but little else.

There was no comprehensive medical care, disability compensation, vocational training, effective treatment for “shell shock” or brain injuries, or pensions for veterans’ survivors.

And there was no national organization dedicated to helping war heroes.

Instead, these servicemen and women who defended the United States in the First World War were expected to return home and resume their lives as if nothing had happened. There was no support system in place to heal the physical and mental wounds from the poison gases, trench warfare and other elements of modern warfare in the early 20th century.

These brave soldiers, sailors and Marines answered the government’s call. But the government was not prepared to return the favor.

Instead, a group of men and women who served in the Armed Forces took it upon themselves to forge The American Legion, a proud national organization dedicated to veterans, current servicemembers, their families, the youths of America and ordinary citizens. The American Legion was formally chartered by Congress in 1919, committed to four key pillars that still stand today: Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children and Youth.

The Legion, conceived primarily by Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., embraced the mission to follow Lincoln’s post-bellum call for America to “care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan.” Working through a rapidly multiplying network of community posts, The American Legion became the nation’s largest self-help organization. The Legion established tuberculosis hospitals, found employment for veterans, launched a program of monetary grants to assist widows and orphans, and assisted those suffering from the mental wounds of war.

It was this commitment to veterans that would soon lead The American Legion to a discovery that would shock the nation.





In 1923, The Legion conducted a nationwide survey to ascertain how World War I veterans were readjusting to civilian life.

The results were startling. Some veterans of the Great War were homeless, suffering from what we know today as PTSD; not a few were housed in jails, mental institutions and county homes. Too many had given up on life, had no hope and no future. It was not uncommon to see former “dough-boys,” without arms or legs, selling apples and pencils on the street corners of America, just trying to survive.

The public outcry was loud and clear. The result was the creation of the Veterans Administration, an entity that consolidated under one roof the services of many government agencies that had a small piece of the rehabilitation pie. Today, that agency has grown to become the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Federal and state laws were enacted, based on Legion advice gathered from thousands of its service officers working with veterans and their families, one on one, in the communities where they lived.

Those laws brought compensation for veterans who had suffered service-connected disabilities. They built a nationwide system of veterans hospitals and clinics and established veterans homes, veterans cemeteries, and pensions for the surviving spouses of those who had given their lives for our country.

Thanks in no small part to the diligence and vision of The American Legion, “shell shock” has been re-diagnosed as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); exposure to Agent Orange is now a recognized service-connected disability due to a study conducted by The American Legion and Columbia University; veterans suffering from mesothelioma, a cancer resulting from exposure to asbestos, and illness because of exposure to ionizing radiation and its resulting cancers, are both now recognized service-connected disabilities. The list is long and grows each year.

Most, if not all, of those conditions were called to the attention of our government, thanks to the Legion’s work with veterans through its Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission.

The American Legion’s founders envisioned a future of honor, respect and prosperity for military veterans and the nation they vowed to protect and defend. That vision brought into existence the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, known as the GI Bill. The American Legion is recognized as the organization that wrote and created the bill, which ushered in monumental changes in U.S. society. Thanks to the GI bill, higher education became democratized after 8 million veterans went to school on their education benefits, obtained better jobs, bought houses in the suburbs and raised families.

The program’s success is especially impressive, considering that the bill passed a House and Senate conference committee by only one vote, and yet has come to be known as one of the greatest pieces of social legislation ever conceived, triggering a half-century of American economic prosperity. For every dollar spent on educating World War II-era veterans, the U.S. economy eventually got \$7 back.

The American Legion still believes in the vision of its founders, a vision for a strong America – freedom and opportunity. And The American Legion firmly believes that veterans and their families have earned every benefit awarded to them by a grateful nation because of their selfless service. Indeed, this basic principle was succinctly written into law when the Supreme Court stated in 1983:

“It is ... not irrational for Congress to decide that, even though it will not subsidize substantial lobbying by charities generally, it will subsidize lobbying by veterans’ organizations. Veterans have ‘been obliged to drop their own affairs and take up the burdens of the nation, subjecting themselves to the mental and physical hazards as well as the economic and family detriments which are peculiar to military service and which do not exist in normal civil life.’ Our country has a long-standing policy of compensating veterans for their past contributions by providing them numerous advantages. This policy has ‘always been deemed to be legitimate.’”

Nearly a century of service

1. Legionnaires have been at the bedside of wounded and sick veterans since the end of World War I, when disabled veterans were often institutionalized in asylums. The Legion helped create the Veterans Administration.
2. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, the original GI Bill, one of the most significant pieces of social legislation in the 20th century.
3. Legionnaires for decades have coordinated and promoted job and career fairs for veterans.
4. American Legion members today spend time at military bases or reach out to returning servicemembers, re-connecting with a new generation of wartime veterans.





PILLAR 2: NATIONAL SECURITY



DoD photo

To those who have sworn with their lives to protect America against enemies near and far, national security is a deeply held value. The terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 exposed this nation's vulnerabilities and magnified the importance of this value - not only for military veterans, but for all Americans. Since then, The American Legion has passed national resolutions supporting and reconfirming its support for the Global War on Terrorism and for all who have critical responsibilities in fighting it: the White House; Congress; departments of Defense, State and Homeland Security; and, foremost, the troops and civilians protecting U.S. interests at home and abroad from terrorist acts.

The American Legion's national security position is multi-faceted. Key aspects include:

- Ensuring a well-funded, well-equipped and well-trained military.
- Focusing awareness and surveillance on rogue nations, terrorist groups and global threats to U.S. security around the world.
- Supporting the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and urging its steadfast protection of U.S. borders, ports and other entry points.
- Enabling a decent quality of life for troops and their families – active duty and reserve-component alike – that includes reasonable compensation, benefits, health care, child care, and family support programs.
- Providing an efficient and compassionate healing and transition program for wounded, ill or injured warriors.

Also within the Legion's national security pillar is the Foreign Relations Commission that works closely with the Department of State to seek peaceful solutions to conflicts around the world, and to advance the goals of U.S. foreign policy.

The American Legion's national security positions include these key areas:

Strong National Defense

A strong, adequately funded U.S. military is essential for global peace and prosperity in the 21st century. As the world's sole superpower, the United States must be able to deter aggression while maintaining the ability to fight and win wars when necessary. Our adversaries should have no doubt about America's resolve and means to respond with overwhelming force when national interests are threatened. Today, however, with the United States facing mounting debt obligations and unprecedented deficit projections, the defense budget has become an easy target. Nevertheless, The American Legion opposes any further decreases in U.S. defense spending.



As the chart below shows, “ever-increasing entitlement spending is putting pressure on key spending priorities such as national defense, a core constitutional function of government. Defense spending has declined significantly over time, even when the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are included, as spending on the three major entitlements — Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid — has more than tripled.” While the Iraq War is over and the Afghanistan War is winding down, the United States and its allies still face a dangerous and unstable world.

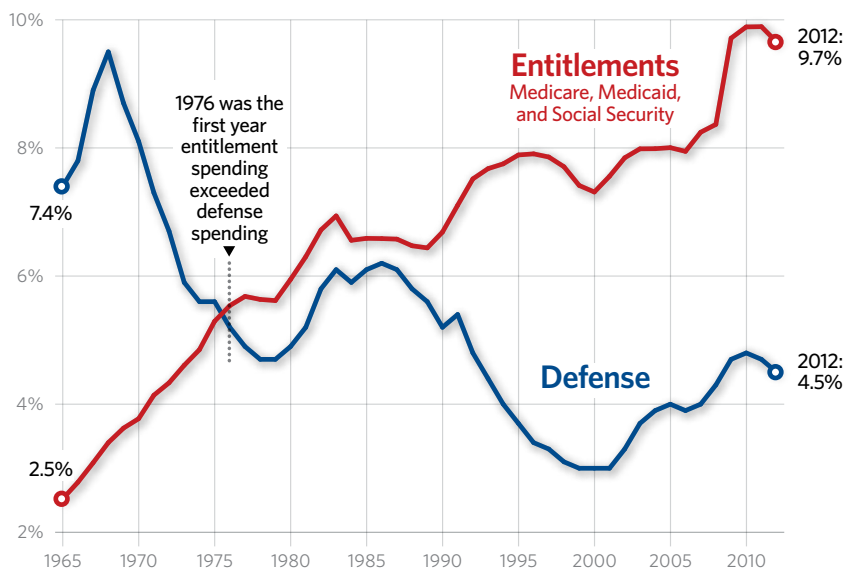
As part of the Budget Control Act of 2011, caps were placed on the defense budget and other forms of discretionary spending. In implementing these budgetary caps, the Obama administration proposed in its FY 2013 budget to cut Pentagon spending by roughly \$487 billion over the next decade. In addition, because Congress failed to meet the act’s deadline to reduce the long-term deficit by \$1.2 trillion, the Pentagon now faces the worst-case scenario: current law now requires additional across-the-board, automatic cuts (sequestration) to the Pentagon budget, totaling more than \$500 billion over 10 years.

A wide range of America’s civilian and military leaders have voiced grave concerns about the danger of further defense cuts, which would dangerously weaken America’s standing in the world and undermine our leadership among allies. Furthermore, after more than a decade of warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. military hardware is in need of replacement and modernization, and our troops deserve the hard-earned benefits of service. We risk leaving our military a “hollow” force like that of the post-Vietnam War era, which took years to rebuild.

Therefore, The American Legion recommends an increase in U.S. defense spending to levels that represent 5 percent of gross domestic product. The Legion recommends that sufficient funding be provided to modernize the Army; strengthen the Navy’s shipbuilding program; build Air Force fighters, tankers and specialty aircraft; develop national missile defense and cyberspace defense systems; and support NASA to retain dominance in outer space. The Legion urges DoD to use American companies whenever possible for military procurement.

The Legion also advocates greater military force end-strength to reduce stress on the reserves and National Guard, decrease the number of extended deployments and better position the United States in the event of a sudden national security emergency.

PERCENTAGE OF GDP



Note: 2012 figures estimated.

MEDICARE AND OTHER ENTITLEMENTS ARE CROWDING OUT SPENDING ON DEFENSE

Ever-increasing entitlement spending is putting pressure on key spending priorities, such as national defense, a core constitutional function of government. Defense spending has declined significantly over time, even when the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are included, as spending on the three major entitlements – Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid – has more than tripled.

Source: The Heritage Foundation

Note: Data from the Office of Management and Budget



IN THE EVENT OF A NATURAL DISASTER

To The American Legion, the provision of security for the nation includes protection of its citizens from the devastating financial effects of natural disasters. In the 1920s, not long after the organization's founding, the Legion entered into an agreement with The American Red Cross to assist in disaster relief and fundraising. The collaboration continued for about a half century until, in the wake of Hurricane Hugo in 1989, the Legion created an autonomous disaster-relief entity, the National Emergency Fund (NEF).

The NEF assists stricken American Legion family members with immediate monetary assistance. Since its inception, the NEF has provided over \$7.5 million in direct financial aid to members and posts. In 2011, for instance, 314 NEF disaster relief grants totaling \$345,300 were awarded to veterans and their families. These NEF grants included those provided after the spring tornadoes and floods that hit the South and Midwest, leaving behind a trail of devastation. Among the victims assisted by NEF so far in 2012 are those displaced by Indiana tornadoes in early spring.

The National Emergency Fund is not the only source of American Legion disaster relief. At the grassroots level, Legion posts such as Post 210 in Montgomery, Ala., are always ready to assist. In 2011, Post 210 members came to the aid of tornado victims in Tuscaloosa, 100 miles away. Legionnaires and their neighbors spent two nights sorting and boxing donated goods such as food and clothing before heading to the storm-ravaged college town.

Military Quality of Life

Disabled military retirees have earned and deserve full concurrent receipt of their DoD retirement pay and their VA disability compensation, which come from separate budgets for separate purposes. Today, too many disabled military retirees are still forced to choose one or the other in what has become known as the "disabled veterans tax."

Military health-care programs must be fully funded without additional enrollment fees or co-payment increases for beneficiaries. TRICARE coverage should also be made permanent for members of the reserves.

Servicemembers who sustain injuries or illnesses while on active duty must be given fair and timely discharge processing, and their transition to civilian life and/or VA health care made seamless. The American Legion strongly supports a continuum of care for disabled veterans after they return to civilian life. The Legion encourages swift and efficient action to integrate various federal departments, agencies and programs to improve the transition process and sustain the continuum of care.

Homeland Security

Since 9/11 and the devastating hurricanes of 2005, America has become acutely aware of the danger posed by terrorist attacks and catastrophic disasters on U.S. soil. The American Legion works closely with government at all levels to improve disaster readiness in local communities and, at the national level, to ensure that a well-funded and efficient DHS is prepared for any catastrophic event.

DHS was created in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Since the inception of DHS, the Legion has supported the department's intent, purpose and arrangement: to harmonize myriad agencies, offices, businesses, community groups and others with readiness responsibilities and quick-response capabilities. The Legion is an active contributor to that effort on the local and national levels, and concurs with the DHS mission to coordinate domestic security - including effective customs operations and drug interdiction.

To help with that effort, the Legion supports funding for the U.S. Coast Guard's "deep water" initiatives to rebuild its fleet and modernize assets to more effectively fulfill responsibilities in maritime safety, law enforcement, homeland security, environmental protection and national defense.



DoD photo



Immigration Enforcement

The Pew Research Center has estimated that 11.2 million illegal immigrants lived in the United States in 2010. DHS's Office of Audits claims that, each year, more than one million aliens attempt to illegally enter this country without proper documentation or enter legally and violate their visas.

A broad exchange of intelligence and related action is needed among the Department of Justice and regulatory agencies that govern immigration policy and social services. Federal agencies must use modern systems and technology to aggressively track foreign nationals as a deterrent to terrorist activities. Failure to properly monitor illegal aliens threatens the security and future of America.

The American Legion urges Congress to adopt an immigration reform policy which emphasizes border security against those individuals attempting to enter this country illegally, and internal tracking of all resident aliens and illegal immigrants. The Legion opposes legislation granting amnesty and legal residency to illegal immigrants currently in the United States.

The Legion also opposes any change to Title V of the "Immigration and Nationality Act" (8 U.S.C. 1531-1537) that would require revealing the source(s) of secret evidence used in administrative deportation hearings by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

The Legion encourages the federal government to provide sufficient resources to enforcement agencies tasked with curtailing illegal immigration, and encourages Congress to mandate continuation of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Student and Exchange Visitor Information System.

Foreign Relations

As the leader of the free world, the United States has great and multiple responsibilities. The American Legion encourages increased federal funding for foreign relations and international affairs, and for the Department of State's continuing efforts to seek peaceful and diplomatic solutions to world conflicts. More funding should also be given to the Department of State's Civilian Response Corps initiative for deployment before, during or after armed conflict.

The Legion strongly supports the State Department and the functions it performs for American citizens overseas; it is the country's first line of defense in combating the myriad security threats that face America from outside its borders. Therefore, the Legion vigorously supports increased funding for the department, so it can maintain a credible initial deterrent to international threats to the United States and effectively promote American interests abroad.

The Legion also urges the president, Congress and the Department of State to significantly increase the number of foreign service officers in its ranks and to implement a veterans preference policy to enhance America's diplomatic missions by recruiting more qualified and experienced veterans.

In addition, the Legion recommends enhanced funding for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) within the Department of State, and recommends such funding be targeted for nations that may become sources of international terrorism.

Full Accounting of American POW/MIAs

A sacred value of The American Legion is the full accounting and repatriation of fallen U.S. servicemembers. The Legion supports Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command activities to locate and repatriate all recoverable remains of U.S. military personnel who have died or are missing in foreign battle zones.



Craig Litten



HEROES TO HOMETOWNS

An example of a prominent American Legion national security program is Heroes to Hometowns. Nationally and locally, the Legion works closely with the Department of Defense (DoD) to connect returning, service-disabled veterans with local resources to help them and their families.

With 14,000 posts worldwide, the Legion assists veterans and families of wounded military personnel as they transition back to civilian and community life, using the VA health-care system, TRICARE or TRICARE for Life.

Last year, Heroes to Hometowns assisted more than 1,100 veterans.



PILLAR 3: AMERICANISM



THE AMERICANISM COMMISSION

The American Legion's Americanism Commission is home to numerous programs that provide and foster healthy, wholesome and educational opportunities for young people, including:

- American Legion Baseball
- Boys Nation and Boys State
- The National High School Oratorical Competition
- Junior Law Cadet
- American Legion Junior Shooting Sports
- The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund (for children of servicemembers who have died on active duty since Sept. 11, 2001)
- Eagle Scout of the Year Scholarship
- The Samsung American Legion Scholarship
- The "Need a Lift?" college financial aid guide
- Flag education
- School Medal Awards

The nation's cultural, moral and patriotic values have been under attack for decades, a disheartening trend that continues today. Prayer has been removed from schools. The U.S. Flag is no longer protected from desecration. The Boy Scouts of America have faced serious legal challenges in some communities they serve. Immigration laws are defied. References to God on U.S. currency, in the Pledge of Allegiance and on public monuments have been challenged by a minority of voices whose vision for America is far different than that of our founding fathers.

The American Legion is an organization dedicated to God and country, with a membership of military veterans who take deep pride in the U.S. Flag and all that it means. Since its inception nearly 100 years ago, the Legion has been a stalwart champion of patriotic values, morals, culture and citizenship. The Legion's pillar of Americanism embodies its devotion to law and order, the raising of wholesome youth, an educated and law-abiding citizenship, and respectful observance of patriotic holidays and remembrances.

For the 2012 election year, The American Legion's priorities for Americanism are:

U.S. Flag Protection

The U.S. Constitution should be amended to add the following: "The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States." The Legion joins all of the states and an overwhelming majority of citizens in declaring that the American flag deserves legal protection from acts of public and intentional acts of physical desecration. In 1989, the U.S. Supreme Court declared flag desecration to be a "right" protected by the First Amendment. The Legion disagreed at the time, and now reaffirms its position that flag desecration is a form of conduct – not speech – that can and should be regulated by law.

All 50 state legislatures have petitioned Congress for a constitutional amendment that would give power to Congress to prohibit such conduct. Such an amendment has passed the House of Representatives six times but has fallen short of the two-thirds majority required to pass the Senate (despite polls showing that about 80 percent of Americans support flag protection). The end of the 111th Congress marked only the second time in more than 16 years when there was no floor vote on a flag protection amendment. As a symbol of our nation, the U.S. Flag belongs to the people, who should be given the power to protect it. The Legion's position on its protection is inviolate.



Illegal Immigration

Illegal immigration stands as one of the most serious problems facing America, with millions of illegal immigrants inside our borders, and billions of dollars spent providing them with social services, education and jobs. The American Legion supports legal and manageable immigration. The Legion adamantly opposes illegal immigration, any kind of amnesty for those who enter America illegally, and ineffective measures to prevent illegal border crossings - particularly during a time of war against terrorism and drug trafficking.

The Legion's strategy to combat illegal immigration calls for strong border security, including physical barriers and high-tech surveillance methods; the elimination of economic and social-service benefits for illegal immigrants; employer sanctions against those who knowingly hire illegal immigrants; and the enforcement of existing immigration laws. The Legion also supports new laws that deny drivers' licenses to illegal immigrants, establish parameters for deporting non-criminals, and the designation of English as the official language of the United States. The Legion's position on immigration seeks to eliminate the visa lottery program, create new visa categories for agricultural workers (to replace those working illegally), and authorize the tracking of foreign visitors, including college students, members of the media and the diplomatic corps.

Voter Registration and Participation

The American Legion connects good government with active citizen participation in the electoral process. American Legion posts throughout the country offer their services and facilities to enable voter registration and promote turnout at the polls. Posts also provide facilities and opportunities for nonpartisan voter-education forums and debates.

It is important to note that, under provisions of its federal charter, the Legion is prohibited from supporting, opposing or providing aid to any political party, or any candidate for public office.



Meghan Newman was among winners of a Samsung Scholarship.

American Legion photo



American Legion photo

Boy Scouts of America

The American Legion vigorously opposes attempts to strip the Boy Scouts of public support, sponsorship and facility space, due to the organization's membership or leadership criteria. The Scouts teach important skills, build character, and provide a healthy and wholesome outlet for young Americans. The organization should not be punished or persecuted for using the term "God" in its oath, or for setting leadership restrictions based on a moral code that the majority of Americans endorse.

THE SAMSUNG AMERICAN LEGION SCHOLARSHIP

After researching dozens of veterans organizations, Samsung Group, a worldwide leader in electronics, chose The American Legion in 1995 to administer an endowed scholarship fund of \$5 million. The endowment was established to show appreciation to U.S. veterans who came to the aid of South Korea during its struggle against Communist forces in the Korean War. The scholarship is for undergraduate study only and may be used for tuition, books, fees, and room and board.

Seven to 10 students are chosen each year for the \$20,000 scholarships, which are awarded to direct descendants of U.S. wartime veterans.



Rebecca Frazer — a home-schooled junior from Morgantown, Ind. — won The American Legion's High School Oratorical Scholarship Program, "A Constitutional Speech Contest," in 2012.

American Legion photo

U.S. FLAG PROTOCOL

The American Legion educates youths on U.S. Flag etiquette to build patriotism and create respect for the flag. The Legion provides education materials that cover a range of topics such as the proper ways to fold, display and dispose of U.S. Flags.

The Pledge of Allegiance

Recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance by students and teachers in our nation's schools should be a regular part of school activities and events. In support of keeping "under God" in the Pledge, The American Legion affirms that pledging allegiance to the U.S. Flag is the voluntary offering of a patriotic oath to the nation; no one should be denied this opportunity. The removal of these words will set a precedent that questions the propriety of numerous references to a supreme being in historical documents, on currency, and on many government buildings (including the U.S. Supreme Court).

Establishment Clause Lawsuits

The American Legion is dedicated to combating the secular cleansing of our American heritage, performed through lawsuits that attack the Boy Scouts, the public display of the Ten Commandments and other symbols of America's religious history. The authority given by Congress to the courts to impose damages, or attorney fees, in establishment-clause cases is being used by legal activists to compel municipalities, state and federal agencies, and private groups to cast off all religious association.

Often, these proceedings are based on the pursuit of tax-funded attorney fees. The Legion supports legislation to expressly preclude courts from awarding attorney fees in lawsuits brought to remove or destroy religious symbols.

LEGION CONNECTS YOUTH TO COMMUNITY, STATE AND NATION

Youth activity programs of The American Legion are designed to stimulate physical, mental and moral growth; cultivate strong character and wholesome ideals with appreciation for our heritage of freedom; and develop a devotion to civic responsibility. Among the Legion's programs for youth are:

High School Oratorical

Students participating in The American Legion's High School Oratorical Scholarship Program gain a deeper knowledge of constitutional principles as they prepare and deliver orations based on some aspect of the U.S. Constitution, with emphasis upon a citizen's duties and obligations to government. Alumni of this Legion program include television news anchor Lou Dobbs and talk-show host Alan Keyes, a former presidential candidate who was the Legion's national oratorical champion and - in the same year - president of the Legion's Boys Nation.

Junior Law Cadet

American Legion Junior Law Cadet is a participative law enforcement vocational learning program that exposes high school students to realistic and demanding training, patterned after authentic recruit training.

Boys State and Boys Nation

Thousands of young men learn the function and powers of government through American Legion Boys State, as they set up and operate their own "governments," fashioned after municipal, county and state structures. Boys State alumni include state legislators, governors, members of Congress, a former vice president and president of the United States, and an associate justice currently sitting on the U.S. Supreme Court. An extension of the Boys State experience is The American Legion Boys Nation. Two outstanding delegates from each Boys State program are selected to represent their state at American Legion Boys Nation, where the young men establish a Boys Nation Senate based upon rules of the U.S. Senate.



Several departments of The American Legion also sponsor County Government Days. For 68 years, the Legion in Nebraska has sponsored such a day across the state, helping high school juniors observe firsthand the workings of local government. Approximately 5,000 students from more than 60 counties participate each year. A partnership with the U.S. Army National Guard in Nebraska helps the Legion cover costs. The American Legion in Kansas sponsors a County Government Day program similar to Boys State, except the government students in each participating high school file for office, campaign and vote in a primary and general election within their school. Students have the opportunity to visit their local courthouse and spend a day learning about duties and responsibilities of county officials. Speakers are heard, and a mock trial is usually observed. The program enjoys cooperation from school and county officials.

Junior Shooting Sports

The American Legion's Junior Shooting Sports Program provides gun safety and marksmanship training for young people. It is recognized as one of the premier programs in the country, with one of its alumni - Launi Meili - becoming the 1992 Olympic Gold Medalist in Women's Shooting.



American Legion Baseball

Each year, nearly 90,000 athletes participate in American Legion Baseball, the nation's oldest and most-respected amateur baseball program. Legion posts sponsor teams in all 50 states and Puerto Rico, giving young men wholesome, healthy activity and lessons in sportsmanship, loyalty, respect for rules and fair play.

Many of the greatest names in the sport spent their teen-age summers in American Legion Baseball uniforms. Hall of Famers such as Dave Winfield, Rollie Fingers, Reggie Jackson and Yogi Berra still speak of the influence Legion ball has had on their lives and careers. To date, 59 major league players and one umpire who played Legion ball have been inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y.

Berra, the legendary New York Yankees catcher, also served as a gunner's mate in the U.S. Navy during World War II. Although Berra played on teams with Mickey Mantle, Whitey Ford, Roger Maris and other legendary players, he said, "The most fun I ever had playing baseball was when I played American Legion Baseball."



Daniel Lowe from Olympia, Wash., claimed the precision champion title at the 2011 Junior Shooting Sports Air Rifle Championship.

American Legion photo



PILLAR 4: CHILDREN AND YOUTH



American Legion photo

TEMPORARY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Facing a third deployment overseas, one servicemember had his activation orders delayed twice. His civilian job replacement had already been hired and he was unable to pay his rent. He turned to his local American Legion post for help, and the answer to this family's crisis came in the form of the Legion's Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) program. Through TFA, a local Legion post can call upon the national organization for cash assistance to help meet the basic needs of minor children of eligible veterans and servicemembers, when all other sources of assistance have been exhausted. Working through national headquarters, the Legion post was able to secure cash-grant assistance for he and his family, which paid the rent and bridged the pay gap - thereby ensuring that his two children and wife would remain in their home.

Money for TFA comes through the American Legion Endowment Fund. In 2011, 1,358 children were helped by TFA, amounting to more than \$635,786 in disbursements.

Today's young people face an array of societal pressures. The dissolution of the traditional American family, illegal drug use, TV shows and movies filled with obscenities and indecencies. There is an alarming increase in bullying, aided by the spread of smart phones and social media.

Gone are the care-free days when children spent their summers playing baseball on vacant lots, lounging in tree houses and riding bikes around town.

The American Legion's National Commission on Children & Youth is guided by three main objectives: to strengthen the family unit, work with quality organizations that provide services for children and provide communities with well-rounded programs that meet the needs of young people.

The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation provides more than \$500,000 in grants each year to nonprofit organizations that work to improve the lives of young people. Such grants have benefited organ-donor campaigns, supported efforts to help military children cope with deployments or loss of a parent, and funded projects that increased public awareness of Huntington's disease, autism, Reyes syndrome, meningitis, spina bifida, diabetes, cancer and other debilitating conditions.

Since its founding in 1919, The American Legion has been a staunch supporter of children and youth. The National Commission on Children & Youth continues that commitment today, as it seeks to improve the well-being of all children. The key to the future of a free and prosperous country, expressed by every generation of veterans, is held by the children and youth of today. The Legion strongly supports traditional family values, assistance for at-risk children and activities that promote their healthy and wholesome development. While there is no way of knowing what issues will face our youth tomorrow, our survival may well depend on the quality of care, education and training that we, as parents and citizens, provide for the young people of today.

The American Legion's Children & Youth pillar's most critical issues are:

Child Pornography. The Legion opposes any attempts to weaken U.S. laws governing production, sale and distribution of pornographic materials.

Catastrophic Illness. The American Legion supports legislation to provide financial assistance to families with children who suffer catastrophic illnesses.

Intellectual Disabilities. The Legion supports research, and early intervention efforts,



to prevent intellectual disabilities, to include research on the development and function of the nervous system, fetal treatments, and gene therapy to correct abnormalities from defective genes; and early intervention programs with high-risk infants and kids.

Immunization for Needy Children. The Legion urges federal funding for state and local health agencies to insure that medically indigent children are afforded the opportunity to receive needed vaccines and treatment.

Family Integrity. The Legion promotes the family as the cornerstone of society and supports National Family Week each November. The Legion further recognizes that the natural family is a fundamental unit, inscribed in human nature and centered on the voluntary union of a man and woman in a lifelong covenant of marriage.

Media Violence. The American Legion supports appropriate state and federal legislation to restrict the excessive use of violence, vulgarity and immoral expressions in movies, television programs, news broadcasts, video games and the Internet.

Drug Abuse. The American Legion fully supports adequate funding for border, state, federal and military drug-trafficking prevention programs to keep illegal substances from reaching our nation's youth.

Child Sexual Exploitation. The Legion supports appropriate laws aimed at the prevention, investigation and prosecution of child sexual exploitation, and seeks to empower the public to take urgent and direct action to enforce a zero-tolerance policy.

THE AMERICAN LEGION CHILD WELFARE FOUNDATION

The foremost philanthropic priority of The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation is to provide other nonprofit organizations with grants to educate the public about the needs of children across the nation. For 2012, the foundation awarded \$506,683 in grants to 18 nonprofit organizations to support programs that help children and youth:

- **Alström Syndrome International of Mount Desert, Maine**, received \$13,125.
- **American Humane Association of Englewood, Colo.**, received \$35,250.
- **Angel Flight Soars, Inc., of Atlanta**, received \$16,564.
- **Autism Speaks, Inc., of New York** received \$22,500.
- **Be The Match Foundation of Minneapolis** received \$16,050.
- **Birth Defect Research for Children of Orlando, Fla.**, received \$18,500.
- **Children's Institute, Inc., of Rochester, N.Y.**, received \$9,500.
- **Mercy Medical Airlift of Virginia Beach, Va.**, received \$43,400.
- **National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth of Minneapolis** received \$41,000.
- **National Center for Missing and Exploited Children of Alexandria, Va.**, received \$25,500.
- **Organization for Autism Research of Arlington, Va.**, received \$49,355.
- **Second Wind Fund, Inc., of Lakewood, Colo.**, received \$23,724.
- **Starr Commonwealth - National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children of Albion, Mich.**, received \$20,000.
- **Texas National Guard Family Support Foundation of Austin** received \$40,000.
- **The American Legion Department of Kansas in Topeka** received \$32,000.
- **ThinkFirst Foundation of Naperville, Ill.**, received \$25,715.
- **Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, Inc., of Washington, D.C.**, received \$25,000.
- **The American Legion Department of Arizona/Sons of The American Legion Detachment of Arizona in Phoenix** received \$49,500.

FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORK

The American Legion's Family Support Network is ready to provide immediate assistance to U.S. military personnel and their families whose lives have been directly affected by the war on terrorism.

When National Guardsmen and reservists are mobilized, their families often find themselves unable to meet normal monthly expenses, and in need of assistance for a variety of everyday chores such as grocery shopping, child care, mowing the grass, fixing the car and other routine household jobs.

To address these issues, the Legion has a nationwide toll-free telephone number (800) 504-4098, for servicemembers and their families to call for assistance. Requests also can be made online at www.legion.org/fsn. All inquiries are referred to The American Legion department in which the call originated. Departments relay the collected information to a local American Legion post. The post then contacts the servicemember or family to see how assistance can be provided. Since the creation of the Family Support Network during the Gulf War, thousands of posts have responded to meet military families' needs.

Posts are reminded that families in financial need with minor children are encouraged to call on the Temporary Financial Assistance program at national headquarters to assist. Otherwise, it is up to local posts to provide or develop sufficient resources to meet the need.

Thousands of requests through the Family Support Network are received every year at all levels of The American Legion, with national headquarters alone receiving 2,153 requests in 2011. Most cases are handled locally, without notification or involvement from the national organization. Creating an ongoing and active relationship with local military units allows posts to respond immediately when needs arise.



RIDERS WITH A CAUSE



American Legion photo

LEGACY SCHOLARSHIPS

The American Legion Legacy Scholarship has awarded scholarship money while also growing its principal:

2004

One scholarship of \$2,000 awarded.

2005

Three \$2,000 scholarships awarded.

2006

Six \$5,000 scholarships awarded.

2007

Eight scholarships awarded for \$4,500 each.

2008

Eleven scholarships awarded for \$3,720 each.

2009

Sixteen scholarships for \$2,250 awarded.

2010

Ten scholarships at \$4,000 each; three scholarships at \$2,000 each.

2011

Twenty-one scholarships at \$2,275 each and two at \$1,100 each.

2012

Eighteen scholarships at \$2,775 each.

While the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are drawing down, some servicemen and women won't be settling back into civilian life. They are among the thousands who gave their lives for our nation during those wars.

Now our nation and The American Legion honor their memories by assisting their children in earning college degrees. The American Legion Legacy Scholarship, established in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, was created to help young people whose parents lost their lives serving in the U.S. Armed Forces.

These children are eligible for federal aid toward their college educations. However, as the escalating cost of college tuition has continued, more help is needed. It is especially difficult for single-parent households to afford the entire cost of college education at this time.

That's where the Legion's Legacy Scholarship comes in. The goal for the fund is to raise \$20 million - enough to allow just the principal to cover college education years from now. To achieve that goal, the Legion counts on one of its most popular and fastest-growing programs: The American Legion Riders.

Riders chapters are well known for their charitable work, which has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for local children's hospitals, schools, veterans homes, severely wounded servicemembers and scholarships. Since 2006, Riders across the United States have joined forces for the Legion Legacy Run, an annual event to raise money for the Legacy Scholarship Fund. The Riders have been a major contributor to the fund, which now totals more than \$5.7 million.

In 2012, The American Legion Legacy Run from Niagara Falls, N.Y., to national convention in Indianapolis attracted more than 400 riders.

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This guide was produced on behalf of the Legion's 2.4 million members, the wartime veterans of the 20th and 21st centuries, who can be found in more than 14,000 posts and nearly every community across our great nation.

This is their vision for a strong America.
