



The
FOUR PILLARS
of
THE AMERICAN LEGION



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.



STILL SERVING: IT'S WHO WE ARE

In 1919, The American Legion was founded on four pillars: Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children & Youth. Each of these pillars encompasses a variety of programs that benefit our nation's veterans, its servicemembers, their families, the youth of America and ordinary citizens. These programs make a difference in hundreds of thousands of lives each year.

Our organization's positions and programs are guided by resolutions passed by American Legion National Convention delegates, and committee and commission members who represent 2.6 million wartime veterans and their families. These programs, and the men and women who take the time to perform them, are what allow The American Legion to make a difference locally, and on the state and national levels.

It's who we are and what we do.

To join: www.legion.org/national/join/about

THE FOUR PILLARS

I. Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

- Access to VA Care
- Better Funding Formula
- Support for Veterans with Special Needs
- Career Opportunities
- A GI Bill for a New Century
- Employment and Business
- Heroes to Hometowns
- Volunteering
- Final Respects

II. National Security

- Strong National Defense
- Military Quality of Life
- Homeland Security
- Foreign Relations
- Full Accounting of POW/MIAs
- Operation Comfort Warriors

III. Americanism

- Flag Protection
- Illegal Immigration
- Voter Registration and Participation
- Boy Scouts
- The Pledge of Allegiance
- Establishment-Clause Lawsuits

IV. Children & Youth

- Child Pornography
- Catastrophic Illness
- Intellectual Disabilities
- Immunization
- Family Integrity
- Media Violence
- Drug Abuse
- Child Sexual Exploitation

PILLAR I: VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION



'A System Worth Saving'

American Legion Field Service representatives research and conduct site visits of VA medical facilities throughout the nation each year and produce a comprehensive assessment. The "System Worth Saving" report provides in-depth analyses of VA health-care performance in all 21 Veterans Integrated Service Networks.

The project, launched in 2002, continues under the guidance of the Legion's "System Worth Saving" Task Force and the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission.

For nearly 90 years, The American Legion has acted as the nation's leading advocate for proper health care, economic opportunity and legal benefits for U.S. military veterans. The Legion was instrumental in the creation of the Veterans Administration in 1930 and an ardent supporter of its elevation to cabinet status when it became the Department of Veterans Affairs in 1989. The relationship between VA and The American Legion continues to evolve today.

As it has for decades, The American Legion continues to aggressively lobby for adequate funding of VA health care, timely access to facilities, fair rulings on benefit claims and economic opportunities for those who have come home changed by their military experiences. A nationwide network of American Legion department service officers works diligently to assist veterans as they pursue benefits and care they earned and deserve. At the local, state and national levels, thousands of Legionnaires provide countless hours to help veterans obtain their benefits. The American Legion provides professional representation in claims appeals, discharge disputes and transition assistance from active-duty to civilian status throughout the country.

Today, as the number of discharged veterans from the global war on terrorism has surpassed 500,000, the Legion's federally chartered role to support them could not be more profound. The Legion strongly believes that a veteran is a veteran, no matter the war era, nature or location of service. In that light, The American Legion is the only organization that works on behalf of all 24.5 million U.S. veterans and all who will follow.

The American Legion stands on the front line of change in the pillar of service known as "Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation."

It is a complex and vital part of the organization's mission, particularly now, as a new generation of wartime veterans enters the civilian and VA world.

Following are Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation issues of high priority to The American Legion:

ACCESS TO VA HEALTH CARE

VA has undergone a well-documented evolution in the past 25 years, dramatically increasing quality of care beyond that of the private or public sectors. An equally well-documented problem, however, is access to that high-quality care. Access to VA care continues to be restricted in many ways, including:

- **The adverse effect on veterans** as a result of the budget-driven suspension of Priority Group 8 veterans from new enrollment in the VA health-care system, which was in opposition to the Veterans Health Care Eligibility Reform Act of 1996.
- **Construction.** Although construction has begun in many areas, more VA facilities await construction in areas where veteran presence has become gradually ubiquitous. The



Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) decision of 2004 identified urgent needs across the country for new VA hospitals and clinics in areas of fast veteran population growth. Five years later, VA announced construction of a stand-alone VA medical center in Denver. However, many other remaining construction projects do not have the funding. The average age of VA medical facilities is approximately 49 years.

- **Care for female veterans.** The American Legion agrees with recent reports stating that primary-care settings should promote routine care within primary care or be linked with specialized women's clinics to enhance coordination and comprehensiveness and, thus, reduce fragmentation of care or potential overuse of care across health systems. However, due to fragmentation of care, it is reported that 49 percent of women veterans have been pushed back to seek comprehensive care outside of the VA health-care system.
- **Long waiting times** for appointments drive away veterans in overburdened VA markets. Waiting times for VA doctor appointments can take months. At one point in recent years, more than 300,000 veterans were waiting 30 days or more for primary-care appointments. The waiting time to see a VA specialist is typically even more frustrating, often taking months.
- **Failure to adjudicate VA benefits claims** and appeals in a timely manner denies access to veterans in need. VA's backlog of approximately 400,000 undecided disability claims, along with thousands of disputed decisions that have not been reconciled, denies care by delaying it.
- **Adequate staffing.** VA health-care facilities must be adequately staffed with health-care providers who receive competitive compensation. In too many markets across the country, doctor, nurse and technician shortages lead VA to seek more expensive and less efficient services from outside providers. Inadequate staffing prevents VA from keeping timely appointment schedules and drives veteran patients away in many markets.
- **Limited access.** Restricted access unnecessarily sends veterans to private contractors for health care formerly available to them in VA facilities. Particularly for long-term care and mental-health services, VA increasingly relies on outside contractors who do not understand the unique needs of veterans consistently suffering from such conditions as combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, Agent Orange exposure and other service-connected problems.
- **Rural health care.** Veterans in rural areas often are denied access by the sheer distance between their homes and the VA medical centers equipped to serve them. Many plans have been piloted to enhance care for rural veterans, but significant improvement – aside from a recent mileage-reimbursement increase – has yet to be realized. Without greater VA clinical presence in many areas of the country, access is denied to these veterans.

A BETTER FUNDING FORMULA FOR VA HEALTH CARE

The discretionary process of funding the Veterans Health Administration is flawed because it fails to match actual dollars with actual demand. This breakdown has led to numerous emergency funding actions by Congress and has left VA without any new budget at all to begin a new fiscal year, for more than a decade. VA must be funded on the basis of real cost, without burdening veterans on fixed incomes by doubling deductibles and installing new enrollment fees that do not guarantee timely access to care. VA administrators must be given workable budgets to begin their fiscal year; the practice of running VA health-care facilities on questionable cost estimates in multiple continuing resolutions must cease. Enrollment fees are paid through honorable military service, not out of veterans' pockets as a hedge against a miscalculated discretionary budget. New patient enrollment fees and dramatic copayment increases are not viable options to balance VA's medical-care budget. Sufficient, timely and predictable funding would ensure the government meets its obligation to provide timely, quality health care.



The Legion's Network of Service Officers

The American Legion maintains a network of approximately 2,000 professional, accredited representatives – known also as service officers or department service officers – who are officially recognized by VA to provide representation and assistance to veterans and their dependents. The service is free to veterans, regardless of membership.

The American Legion National Headquarters also maintains fully staffed offices of professional appeals representatives at VA's Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA) and Appeals Management Center (AMC). National appeals representatives at the BVA and AMC provide direct representation to veterans and survivors whose claims are denied at the regional office level and then appealed.

The Legion has national service officers assigned to VA's two Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) rating activities in Winston-Salem, N.C., and Salt Lake City. These BDD representatives provide direct representation and other assistance to separating servicemembers filing VA disability claims prior to release from active duty.

The American Legion works with the National Veterans Legal Services Program, a nonprofit veterans law firm and consultant to The American 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.



Careers for Veterans

The American Legion Economic Commission and the Legion's Veterans Small Business Task Force actively pursue new career opportunities for veterans through job fairs and business workshops across the country. The American Legion has formal partnerships with RecruitMilitary, LLC, Avue Technologies and Military.com, a subsidiary of Monster.com, to participate in a robust schedule of career fairs throughout the year.

The Legion has aggressively lobbied for improved compliance of laws requiring no less than 3 percent of federal contracts be awarded to businesses owned by service-disabled veterans, along with other opportunities for veteran entrepreneurs.

www.vetjobs.us

www.military.com

www.recruitmilitary.com

American Legion Economic Division
(202) 861-2700, ext. 1601

The American Legion supports:

- Funding reform for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health-care system that will ensure sufficient, timely and predictable funding.
- The authorization of VA to collect Medicare reimbursements for services provided to enrolled, Medicare-qualified, non-service-connected veterans, similar to the authorization granted to Indian Health Services and TRICARE for Life.
- The full reinstatement of Priority Group 8 veterans and improved performance standards in collections from their insurance companies. Public Law 110-329 provides VA additional funding to allow expanded enrollment opportunity for certain Priority Group 8 veterans. The new provision allows veterans whose incomes do not exceed the VA means test threshold or the geographic means test threshold (whichever is applicable) by more than 10 percent to enroll in VA's health-care system. Veterans who apply for enrollment after the effective date of the new provision, who do not qualify for a higher priority group and whose incomes exceed the applicable means test thresholds by 10 percent or less will be placed in Priority Group 8b or 8d and enrolled in the VA health-care system
- Protection from a doubling of prescription copayments and/or the introduction of annual VA health-care enrollment fees.

VETERANS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The American Legion strongly supports efforts to improve services, advance research and deliver compassionate treatment to veterans with special needs, such as:

- Those who have become homeless since discharge from the service.
- Those who suffer from traumatic brain injuries and/or mental illness.
- Those who have suffered multiple combat injuries, defined as polytrauma.
- Those who battle with conditions related to Agent Orange exposure, Gulf War illness, radiation exposure due to atomic testing, mustard-gas exposure, and other medical problems linked, or presumably linked, to military service.

The Legion specifically urges VA and Congress to fund and adequately staff a greater number of Vet Centers around the country, which provide mental-health and occupational outreach to thousands of veterans who otherwise look to the VA medical system for help, or who end up on the street.

The Legion also supports recommendations from the President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors to enhance focus on traumatic brain injury and PTSD among veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. The Legion supports new VA polytrauma centers across the country to manage unique problems faced by OIF and OEF combat veterans.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES FOR VETERANS

Job and education opportunities are pushed aside to make time for military service. Career advancement and college educations often are delayed. For some veterans returning to civilian life with physical disabilities or personal problems, such a transition can be daunting. The Legion's Economic Commission, a major part of the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation pillar, works specifically in that area.

A GI BILL FOR A NEW CENTURY

The American Legion worked closely with Congress to help pass the Post 9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Act Bill last summer. However, many veterans do not fully understand the new education benefit and how it can help them. For the latest in veterans education benefits, visit The American Legion's online resource for the GI Bill and more at mygibill.org.

EMPLOYMENT AND BUSINESS

The American Legion actively participates in numerous outreach efforts for veterans seeking employment or business opportunities after military service. The Legion aggressively lobbies for veterans' preference laws and compliance with laws designed to provide



incentives for disabled-veteran entrepreneurship. Similarly, the Legion's Economic Commission assists in job and career fairs throughout the country and works to protect the careers and benefits of reservists and National Guardsmen during military deployments.

HEROES TO HOMETOWNS

The American Legion's Heroes to Hometowns program helps severely injured U.S. servicemembers successfully transition back into their communities and civilian lives. Technically a national program, Heroes to Hometowns, or H2H, cannot work without the



grassroots efforts of American Legion posts. The American Legion works closely with DoD and VA to identify veterans in need and provide readjustment help and mentoring . In 2008, The American Legion entered into a pilot program with VA to create H2H VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) coordinators at 10 sites: Boston; Dayton, Ohio; Louisville, Ky.; Phoenix; Providence, R.I.; Richmond, Va.; St. Louis; San Diego; Washington, D.C.; and West Haven, Conn. The H2H VAVS coordinators work with the VA medical center to identify transitioning servicemember needs and create a community resource directory to connect those needs with community support and assistance.

VOLUNTEERING

The American Legion is a staunch supporter of the VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) program. In fiscal 2008, there were more than 6,500 Legion volunteers nationwide that volunteered more than 900,000 hours in VA medical centers, community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs), Vet Centers and state veterans homes. For more information concerning individual or post participation, contact the VAVS program manager at your nearest VA medical center. He or she will arrange an initial screening and help you in choosing the program that best meets your time and interests. Information is also available on the Internet at: www.va.gov/volunteer or www.legion.org/veterans/affairs/volunteer.

FINAL RESPECTS

The American Legion works closely with the National Cemetery Administration, Arlington National Cemetery, and other federal and state governments and entities to ensure a proper burial for all veterans, as well as honorable burial services for the veteran, the family of the veteran and other loved ones. The Legion also serves as a major coordinator of the Missing in America Project, which ensures that cremated remains of veterans, long forgotten in funeral homes, hospitals and other establishments, are respectfully laid to rest. The American Legion provides a large portion of the Missing in America Project's volunteers.

Backlog of Pending VBA Claims Creates Veteran Job Opportunities

The backlog of pending Veterans Benefits Administration claims, as of March 21, 2009, had reached 700,917. Of those, 403,197 were rating cases. Since the end of 2004, when 321,458 rating cases were pending, the backlog has grown significantly.

Between 2006 and 2007, the number of pending ratings cases increased by about 14,000. Over 25 percent of the cases were pending for longer than 180 days. At the end of fiscal 2008, the average number of days to complete a claim from date of receipt was 179 days, down 3.5 days from the previous year.

Inadequate staffing levels, lack of continuing education, and increased pressure to make quick decisions result in an overall decrease in quality of work. These are among the most common complaints raised by regional office employees interviewed by American Legion staff during regional office quality checks. It is unrealistic to expect VA, with current staffing levels, to continue to process an ever-increasing workload while maintaining quality and timeliness.

The current wartime situation provides an excellent opportunity for VA to actively seek out returning veterans from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, especially those with service-connected disabilities, for employment opportunities within VBA.



MAKING SURE THE CARE DOESN'T STOP

When it comes to The American Legion, the motto “veterans helping veterans” can mean a lot of things. It might mean Legion representatives traveling to Washington to lobby for advanced appropriations status for VA health-care funding. It might mean American Legion service officers filing VA claims for service-connected disabled veterans. It might mean a post honor guard delivering an appropriate send-off for a fallen comrade.

Or, the case of Post 17 in Paragould, Ark., “veterans helping veterans” might mean donating its post facility so fellow veterans could get the care they need and deserve. That’s what happened during winter 2009, when a major ice storm knocked out electricity at the VA community-based outreach clinic in Paragould. In late January, the storm knocked down power lines and killed power to residences and businesses alike. The VA clinic was among the casualties. Post 17 also was; its power was restored in a few days.

The VA clinic’s power stayed out, and its 2,000 patients were going to be forced to drive 60 miles to the nearest VA facility, John J. Pershing Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Poplar Buff, Mo. But a call to Post 17 changed all that.

“Someone from the VA in Poplar Bluff called us and asked if they could use our facility,” said Post 17 Adjutant D.W. Kennemore, who had lost power at his own house and was living in his generator-powered motor home. “We didn’t hesitate. We told them to bring what they could, everything that they needed, and set up in our post. We knew those patients needed somewhere to go.”

It was an easy decision to contact Post 17, VA public affairs officer Chuck Hayden told the *Paragould Daily Press*. “At one time, we did not have a clinic in Paragould. We had a traveling clinic, and we did hold a clinic out of that very same American Legion a few years ago,” Hayden said. “When we found out The American Legion had power, we requested to use their site to provide health care.”

After moving its equipment to Post 17, the clinic – which provides primary-care treatment and mental-health services – was able to continue seeing patients. The clinic normally sees 40 patients per day, and in the first three days of being open it saw 35 patients for care. Others had come to the post to refill their prescriptions or to have medical questions addressed. The clinic stayed at the post from Feb. 3 to Feb. 6 before it was able to move back into its own facility.

“We’ve always had a good working relationship with our veterans service organizations, and most of them don’t hesitate when we need assistance,” Hayden said. “We did not know how long it would take to get power back on, and it already had been out a significant period of time. We wanted to be able to continue providing care to our veterans. It was very important for the post to let us use its building.”

Kennemore, a 100-percent service-connected disabled veteran, goes to the Paragould VA clinic. He said it was an easy decision to say yes to VA. “The clinic is for veterans. Our building had electricity,” he said. “It just made sense for us to let them use our building. It was the right thing to do.”



ALL FOUR PILLARS IN ONE GOLF OUTING

A first-time effort to raise money for The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund was so successful that it is now an annual event.

The Heroes to Hometowns Golf Classic, held at Andrews Air Force Base in Upper Marlboro, Md., in October 2008, raised \$15,000 for the fund, which was established to provide educational support to the children of U.S. servicemembers killed on active duty on or after Sept. 11, 2001.

The American Legion National Economic Commission and The American Legion Small Business Task Force sponsored the event. Among the 55 golfers who participated were wounded veterans from Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

Task force members Charles Baker and Louis Celli took the lead in coordinating the first annual Golf Classic.

“We were very pleased with the turnout,” said Celli, vice chairman of the Legion’s Small Business Task Force. “Most impressive was the way our veteran-owned businesses stepped up to the plate and supported the event. The relationship The American Legion is developing with our veteran-owned businesses has proven to be a critical component in tying our community together.”

The Heroes to Hometowns Golf Classic provides opportunities for military members and veterans to network with veteran and service-disabled veteran business owners for employment and mentorship purposes. Additionally, veterans can network with government procurement and legislative leaders; they consequently learn how to do business with the government and gain an understanding of how pending or proposed legislation will affect veteran-owned businesses.

Some of the companies that participated and/or sponsored wounded servicemembers were Clark Construction, Avue Technologies, The Sierra Group, Alpha Technologies Telecommunications Inc., Revis Engineering Inc., the Berlin Steel Construction Co., Birch Advisors LLC, Cisco Systems Inc., Oak Grove Technologies, Microtech LLC, Dominion Electric Supply Co. Inc., Southwestern Veterans Business Resource Center, BRL Roofing LLC, IRG Plotters & Printers Inc. and CICC Inc.

A similar event is planned for October 2009.

“This is a wonderful event that I believe will grow in size and value in years to come,” National Commander David K. Rehbein said. “Not only does it provide a terrific networking opportunity for business leaders, veterans and veteran advocates, it benefits a terrific cause.”

PILLAR II: NATIONAL SECURITY



Full support

The American Legion always has lobbied for quality-of-life improvements for U.S. servicemembers. But when it comes to troop support, the organization puts its money where its mouth is, thanks to volunteers on the local and department levels.

The Department of Virginia's Fourth District distributed tens of thousands of phone cards, containing 30 minutes of international airtime and 50 minutes of U.S. airtime to military personnel and veterans. The cards allow deployed servicemembers to call home, and wounded veterans to stay in contact with their families across the country.

In late December 2008, The American Legion Department of Tennessee shipped 16 laptop computers with webcams to the Pat Tillman USO Center at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan. Funds for the computers – which allow U.S. troops to see friends and family they're communicating with online – came from the department's entire Legion family.

Operation Freedom Car, sponsored by American Legion Racing, has sent 400 cases of "4-in-1" hygiene liquid to troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. "4-in-1" serves as shampoo, conditioner, body wash and shaving cream, in a travel-sized bottle.

Since its founding in 1919, The American Legion remains steadfast in its support of a strong national defense, which is reflected in the Preamble to The American Legion Constitution: "To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America," and "to safeguard the principles of justice, freedom, and democracy."

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

- A well-funded, well-equipped and well-trained military.
- Awareness and surveillance of rogue nations, terrorist groups and global threats to U.S. security around the world.
- Support for the Department of Homeland Security and urging its steadfast protection of U.S. borders, ports and other points of access.
- Comprehensive disaster preparedness.
- A decent quality of life for troops and their families – active-duty and reserve components alike – that includes reasonable compensation, benefits, health care, child care and family-support programs; and an efficient and compassionate healing and transition program for wounded and ill warriors.

Matters such as transition to civilian life, and using the VA health-care system, TRICARE or TRICARE for Life also fall within the realm of national security. The American Legion represents military members during the medical discharge process and assists in their pursuit of education benefits, employment counseling, training and health care. The American Legion works as an advocate for an improved disability evaluation system within the Department of the Defense by providing counseling, guidance and representation for servicemembers through the proceedings of the medical evaluation boards and physical evaluation boards. Staff regularly meets one-on-one with military personnel and in group settings to alert them to the resources and opportunities available as they prepare to return home.

A STRONG NATIONAL DEFENSE

The American Legion's national-security positions include the following tenets:

- The American Legion recommends an increase in U.S. defense spending to levels that represent at least 5 percent of the gross domestic product, in time of war, to include pay raises for military personnel that keep pace with cost-of-living increases and close the gap between military and private-sector pay.
- The Legion recommends that federal funding be provided to strengthen the Navy's ship-building program; to develop the Army's force structure; to build Air Force fighters, tankers and specialty aircraft; to develop a national missile-defense system and cyberspace defense program; and to support NASA for dominance in space.
- The Legion urges DoD to use U.S. companies when possible for military procurement.



- Greater military force end strength, from 1.7 million to 2.1 million, is recommended to reduce stress on the reserve components and National Guard, decrease the number of extended deployments, and better position the United States in the event of a sudden national-security threat outside the Iraq and Afghanistan war theaters. The Legion also continues its ongoing support for the Selective Service system.

MILITARY QUALITY OF LIFE

Disabled military retirees 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, most disabled military retirees are 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 copayment increases for beneficiaries. TRICARE coverage should be made permanent for members of the reserve components, as well. Military personnel who sustain injuries or illnesses while on 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 re-integrate 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 that continuum of care.

HOMELAND SECURITY

The threat of terrorist attacks or other catastrophic disasters in the United States came painfully to light on Sept. 11, 2001, and following the devastating hurricane season of 2005. The American Legion works closely with government at all levels to improve disaster readiness in local communities and, at the national level, to assure a well-funded and efficient Department of Homeland Security is prepared for any contingency.

Since the Department of Homeland Security’s creation after the terrorist attacks of 2001, The American Legion has supported its intent, purpose and arrangement: to harmonize myriad agencies, offices, businesses, community groups and others with readiness responsibilities and quick-response capabilities. The American Legion is an active contributor to that synergy from local to national levels. The Legion concurs with 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 “Deepwater” initiatives to rebuild its fleet and modernize assets to more effectively fulfill responsibilities in maritime safety, law enforcement, homeland security, environmental protection and defense.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Also within the Legion’s national-security pillar is a Foreign Relations Commission that works closely with the Department of State to seek peaceful solutions to various world conflicts and to advance U.S. foreign policy around the globe. The American Legion supports policies and legislation that will enhance funding for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) within the Department of State and seeks use of that funding toward targeted states whose failure to provide for their people could result in the expansion of international terrorism.

The American Legion encourages increased federal funding for foreign relations and international affairs and for the Department of State’s continuous effort to seek peaceful and diplomatic solutions to world conflicts, as well as the Department of State’s initiative for creation of the Civilian Response Corps for deployment before, during or after military campaigns.

FULL ACCOUNTING OF POW/MIAS

A sacred value of The American Legion is the full accounting and repatriation of fallen U.S. service personnel. The American Legion is dedicated to keep this cause in the forefront of the minds of elected officials and America at large. The Legion supports Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command activities to locate and repatriate all recoverable remains of U.S. military personnel who have fallen or are missing in foreign battle zones.



Operation Comfort Warriors

Operation Comfort Warriors has raised more than \$150,000 in an effort to provide comfort items to wounded U.S. troops in military hospitals around the world.

The National Security/Foreign Relations staff at the Legion’s Washington office works with the American Red Cross and various military hospitals to coordinate the logistics of the program. The staff also utilizes the expertise within American Legion Emblem Sales and the military exchange systems to get the best purchasing options for this operation.

Comfort items provided by this program include sweat suits, puzzles, video games, DVDs, iTunes gift cards, hats, gloves, portable electronics, laptops, and a biofeedback system for the Madigan Army Hospital at Fort Lewis, Wash. The biofeedback system will provide needed therapy to troops with post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injuries and other war-related disabilities.

The American Legion has delivered to, or ordered, comfort items for Walter Reed; Bethesda, Md.; Fort Lewis, Wash.; Fort Hood, Texas; Fort Bragg, N.C.; Camp Lejeune, N.C.; Portsmouth, Va.; Fort Carson, Colo.; Fort Drum, N.Y.; Fort Stewart, Ga.; Twenty-nine Palms, Calif.; Camp Pendleton, Calif.; Fort Campbell, Ky.; Fort Riley, Kan.; and Landstuhl, Germany. Possible donations are planned for Vicenza, Italy; Fort Gordon, Ga.; Fort Knox, Ky.; Schofield Barracks, Hawaii; Fort Bliss, Texas; Fort Dix, N.J.; Fort Belvoir, Va.; Fort Lee, Va.; and Germany.

A LEGACY OF AMERICAN LEGION SERVICE



The American Legion, today comprising 2.6 million wartime veterans, was chartered by the U.S. Congress in 1919, and was founded by men and women who served in the Armed Forces of the United States during World War I.

Among the first to be exposed to modern warfare with its poisonous gases, overlaying fields of machine-gun fire, trench warfare, tanks and artillery, these soldiers, sailors and Marines suffered both the mental and physical wounds of war.

When the armistice was announced on Nov. 11, 1918, they came home to parades, but little else. There was no comprehensive medical care, disability compensation, vocational training, effective treatment for shell shock, and no pensions for widows and orphans.

The men and women who had won the Great War were expected to come home as if nothing had happened, and to pick up where they had left off. They were expected to get on with their lives with little or no assistance from the government whose call they had answered.

This fledgling American Legion, conceived primarily by Theodore Roosevelt Jr., took on the mission to follow Lincoln's postbellum call for America to "care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan." Working through a fast-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, established

a program of monetary grants to assist widows and orphans, and assisted those suffering from the mental wounds of war.

In 1923, The American Legion conducted a nationwide survey to ascertain how World War I veterans were readjusting to civilian life. What the Legion survey revealed shocked the nation.

Some veterans of the Great War were homeless, many suffered 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 doughboys, without arms or legs, selling apples and pencils on the street corners of our nation, just trying to survive.

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

Federal and state laws were enacted, based on the Legion's advice, that had been gathered from thousands of service officers who were 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 mesothelioma, cancer resulting from exposure to asbestos, and illness due to exposure to ionizing radiation, and its resulting cancers, are both now recognized service-connected disabilities. This list is long and grows longer each year.

Most, if not all, of these conditions were called to the attention of our government due to the Legion's work with veterans through its Veterans Affairs and 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, today known as the GI Bill. The American Legion is recognized as the organization that wrote and created the bill. Ironically, it passed the conference committee of the House and Senate by only one vote, and, yet, has come to be known as the greatest piece of social legislation ever conceived, triggering a half-century of American economic prosperity.

The American Legion still believes in the

vision of our 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.’”

This informational guide was produced on behalf of our membership, the wartime veterans of the 20th and the 21st century, 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.

Ninety years of advocacy

- 1.** Legionnaires have been at the bedsides 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, commonly regarded as the most significant piece 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 on active military bases or reach out to returning servicemembers, reconnecting with the new generation of veterans.

PILLAR III: AMERICANISM



Many cultural, moral and patriotic values have come under serious attack in the United States in recent years. Prayer has been removed from schools. The U.S. flag is no longer protected from anarchists. Boy Scouts of America faces serious legal duels in the communities it serves. The institution of marriage is under siege. Immigration laws are defied. References to God have been challenged on U.S. currency, in the Pledge of Allegiance and in the public square, all by a minority of voices whose vision for America is far different from that of our Founding Fathers. Our nation's very identity is at stake as more and more values are driven toward extinction. As an organization dedicated to God and country, with a membership of military veterans that takes deep pride in the U.S. flag and all it means, The American Legion has always been a stalwart champion of patriotism, morality and citizenship. Upon the pillar of Americanism is The American Legion's devotion to law and order, the raising of wholesome youth, respectful observance of patriotic holidays and remembrances, education and law-abiding citizenship. Among The American Legion's highest Americanism priorities 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 American Legion joins all the states and an overwhelming majority of citizens in its position that the American flag deserves legal protection from acts of intentional public physical desecration. In 1989, the U.S. Supreme Court declared flag desecration to be a "right" protected by the First Amendment of the Constitution. The American Legion disagreed then and reaffirms now 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. Poll after poll show that upwards of 80 percent of Americans support flag protection. Lopsided majorities in both chambers of Congress have supported a flag amendment. The House of Representatives has passed such a proposed amendment in six consecutive votes; the measure has fallen just slightly short of achieving super-majority in the Senate, leaving it just one vote short of passing in the 109th Congress. As a symbol of our nation, the U.S. flag belongs to the people, who should be given the power to protect it. The American Legion's position on its protection is inviolate.

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

The American Legion supports manageable, legal immigration. By multiple resolutions that determine policy, the Legion adamantly opposes illegal immigration, amnesty for those who illegally enter the United States, and ineffective measures to prevent illegal border crossing, particularly during a time of war. 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-services 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 illegal immigrants driver's licenses, establish parameters for non-criminal deportation, and designate English as the official language of the U.S. government. The Legion's position on illegal immigration seeks elimination of the visa lottery program, the creation of new visa categories for temporary agricultural workers to replace those who are working illegally, and authority to track foreign visitors to include college students, press, and members of any foreign diplomatic corps. Illegal immigration stands as one of the most serious problems facing America, with as many as 20 million illegal immigrants inside our borders, and billions of dollars spent providing social services, education and jobs for them. The American Legion supports the law on this matter and strongly urges the U.S. government to enforce it. Providing assistance and instruction to immigrants following the legal path to U.S. citizenship has been a long-standing and proud tradition upheld by The American Legion since its founding in 1919. Helping legal immigrants prepare for their naturalization test and assimilation into American society is in the best interest of our nation. For decades many Legionnaires and Legion posts throughout the country have hosted naturalization orientation sessions to help teach proficiency of the English language and lessons in U.S. history and civics.

VOTER REGISTRATION AND PARTICIPATION

The American Legion connects good government with active citizen participation in the electoral process. Legion posts throughout the country offer their services and facilities to stimulate registration and turnout at the polls. Posts also provide facilities and opportunities for non-partisan, voter-education forums and debates. Under the provisions of its federal charter, it is important to note that The American Legion is prohibited from supporting, opposing or providing aid to any political party or any candidate for public office.

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 skills, build character, and provide a healthy and wholesome outlet for young Americans. The organization should not be punished or persecuted for acknowledging God in its oath or for setting leadership restrictions based on a moral code that the majority of Americans endorse.

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 flag is the voluntary offering of a patriotic oath to the nation, that no one should be denied this opportunity, and that 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 of our 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 by 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 the American Civil Liberties Union and others to compel municipalities, state and federal agencies, along with private groups, to cast off religious association, often in pursuit of tax-funded attorney fees.



Junior Shooting Sports

The American Legion's Junior Shooting Sports Programs provide gun safety and marksmanship training for young people. The program, conducted at local posts and shooting facilities nationwide, culminates each year with a national championship competition at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs.



THE AMERICAN LEGION LEGACY RUN

“My dad had an impact on my life that no one else could have on me. He was so many things to me; he was my support, my guide, my confidant and my comfort. Losing him was the worst thing that I have ever had happen in my life. I would like to honor him and would like to make him and my family proud by achieving my goals. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to make this happen.”

The words of a college student whose military father lost his life after the tragic terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, demonstrate just how important it is to live up to one of The American Legion’s – and our nation’s – most important obligations. Within weeks of the attacks, The American Legion Legacy Scholarship was established to help young people whose parents have lost their lives serving in the armed forces in the years following 9/11. Children of U.S. military personnel killed at war are entitled to receive federal money toward their college educations, but these funds do not cover the entire cost, and the gap widens as college tuitions and expenses continue to climb. It is especially difficult for a single parent to afford. The goal of The American Legion Legacy Scholarship fund is \$20 million, enough to fund college educations for young people years from now through earnings on the principal. To reach that goal, The American Legion relies heavily on one of its most popular and fast-growing programs: The American Legion Riders. Motorcycle-riding veterans from across the country have joined the Legion Riders for annual cross-country treks, raising funds while riding from Indianapolis to national conventions in Salt Lake City, Reno, Nev., and Phoenix. Another is planned for the 2009 National Convention in Louisville, Ky. The rides have raised more than \$1 million for the scholarship program, which is already distributing scholarship dollars while simultaneously building up the principal. Legion Riders chapters have flourished in recent years and became an official program of the organization in 2007. It has since expanded to more than 800 chapters.

www.legion.org/programs/legacyrun/overview
www.americanlegionriders.net



AMERICAN LEGION BOYS NATION

Presidents, governors, members of Congress and local community servants are among thousands of young men who learned the way the U.S. government works by participating in American Legion Boys Nation. Boys Nation participants are selected from Boys State programs across the country. Each delegate represents his state as a senator. An intense week of training and education in the legislative process also includes tours of Washington monuments and memorials, along with an occasional visit from the president. Boys Nation began in 1946 at American University in Washington. Boys State began in 1935 in Illinois as an effort to counter fascist youth camps springing up around the country at the time. At Boys State, high-school juniors learn the rights, privileges and responsibilities of a franchised citizen.



Oratorical Program

The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program teaches appreciation of the U.S. Constitution. Finalists come to Indianapolis in April of each year to compete for \$138,000 in college scholarships.

AMERICAN LEGION BASEBALL

Many of the greatest names in the sport spent their teenage summers in American Legion Baseball uniforms. Hall of Famers such as Dave Winfield, Rollie Fingers, Reggie Jackson and Stan Musial still speak of the influence Legion ball had on their lives and careers. Each year, nearly 100,000 athletes participate in American Legion Baseball, the nation's oldest and most respected amateur baseball program. 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.

"I was proud to wear The American Legion uniform because it was the first uniform I had," remembered Stan "The Man" Musial, the former St. Louis Cardinals great and member of the National Baseball Hall of Fame. "The American Legion has supported baseball for many years, and it has an outstanding program for our young players."

www.baseball.legion.org

PILLAR IV: CHILDREN & YOUTH



The American Legion's Commission on Children & Youth manages a pillar of service guided by three main objectives: to strengthen the family unit, to support quality organizations that provide services for children and youth, and to provide communities with well-rounded programs that meet the physical, educational, emotional and spiritual needs of young people. The commission works to provide hope for children who face health, safety, discipline or home-life challenges and provides opportunities for young people to succeed. The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation provides more than \$500,000 in grants to nonprofit organizations each year that work to improve the lives of young people. These grants have aided organ-donor campaigns, supported efforts to help military children cope with deployment 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 conditions.

The Commission on Children & Youth has focused recent attention on several important national programs, including the Children's Miracle Network, Ronald McDonald House Charities, Special Olympics, youth suicide prevention, Halloween safety, Family Support Network and Temporary Financial Assistance for families of the deployed, and Operation: Military Kids, among others. The American Legion has been a staunch supporter of the children and youth of our nation since its founding in 1919. The commitment continues today for the National Commission on Children & Youth, as it seeks to improve the well-being of all children. Every generation of veterans knows that the key to the future of a free and prosperous country 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 young people today.

The American Legion's Children & Youth pillar includes positions on:

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 enacting legislation to financially assist families facing catastrophic illness of a child.

Intellectual Disabilities. The American Legion supports continuing research, and early intervention efforts, to prevent intellectual disabilities, including research on the develop-



ment and function of the nervous system, fetal treatments and gene therapy to correct abnormalities produced by defective genes, and early intervention programs with high-risk infants and children.

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

Family Integrity. The Legion promotes the family as the cornerstone of society and supports National Family Week in November. The Legion further recognizes that the natural family is the 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, video games and the Internet.

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

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

FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORK

An e-mail sent to The American Legion's Family Support Network in 2008 read, "I am currently in Afghanistan, and I am worried about my children's safety." A Massachusetts National Guardsman and father of five children learned that a section of his backyard fence had fallen down. With a busy highway only a few feet away, the children's only play area became a safety concern. The local post responded by repairing the fence at no cost to the family.

The 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. As National Guard and reserve units are mobilized in record numbers, the families of these men and women often find themselves unable to meet normal monthly expenses and needing assistance for a variety of everyday chores like grocery shopping, child care, mowing the grass, fixing the car and other routine household jobs. To address these issues, The American Legion has a nationwide toll-free telephone number for servicemembers and their families to call for assistance. Requests also can be made online. 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 local post then contacts the military servicemember or family to see how assistance can be provided. Since the creation of the Family Support Network during the Gulf War, thousands of American Legion posts have responded to meet these 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 the resources necessary to meet the need. More than 2,700 requests through the Family Support Network came to National Headquarters in 2008, despite a lower activation rate for servicemembers. 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.

www.legion.org/fsn
(800) 504-4098

Making a world of difference

National Guard Spc. Joy Mack is trying to make a good life as a single parent for herself and her two daughters. But sometimes life doesn't cooperate. Mack and her pre-teen daughters live in a house built in 1964. The furnace, installed when the house was built, was inefficient and beginning to emit pollutants into the house. Mack used space heaters, but they brought the indoor temperature up to only 52 degrees. On top of that, some windows in the house had begun to leak. A failing heating system and leaking windows are a bad combination in the rainy state of Washington.

Before Mack mobilized for one year in Afghanistan, Department of Washington Legion family members stepped up to make sure she would have a livable home to return to after deployment.

"I just put it out there that she needed help, and someone came forward and said he'd get her a furnace and install it," said Legionnaire Jim Broe, commander of Post 161 in Redmond, Wash. "Joy is such a kind person, and she has so much on her plate. We need to help these people out."

Post 161's Auxiliary unit adopted Mack's family for Christmas. In addition, Legionnaire Mike Flood – the Seattle Seahawks' vice president of community relations and special projects – got a group together to help clean up Mack's yard, which had become overrun with blackberry bushes.

The help overwhelmed Mack, who previously served in the U.S. Army. "It's the world to me. I've got enough on my mind with my mission, so it's so nice to know I won't be coming back to a house that my daughters and I can't live in," she said. "I don't have any family in my state. I didn't have anyone to turn to, so this is just amazing to me."

Child Welfare Foundation

The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation awarded \$639,875 in grants for 2009 to 18 nonprofit organizations to support programs that help young people. Included in the grants were:

- **American Humane Association** in Englewood, Colo., received \$7,020 to produce and distribute nationwide the first children's book about family group conferencing.
- **Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America** in Washington received \$14,531 for "Exercise-Induced Asthma Educational Program."
- **Caring Kids Television** in Dana Point, Calif., received \$45,000 to produce and distribute, through PBS television nationwide, teacher's kits that work in conjunction with "The Doo-it Show."
- **Child and Adolescent Bipolar Foundation** in Wilmette, Ill., received \$40,000 for "Web Site Redesign and Integration."
- **KidsPeace** in Orefield, Pa., received \$57,610 to produce a national radio public-service awareness campaign, to be aired in local communities where KidsPeace has established foster-care services.
- **National Autism Association** in Nixa, Mo., received \$15,000 to produce and distribute outreach materials to local and state autism organizations nationwide.
- **National CASA Association** in Seattle received \$46,915 to produce and distribute a complete turn-key event toolkit that will help local CASA programs produce the project in their communities.
- **National Marfan Foundation** in Port Washington, N.Y., received \$25,000 to produce a reference guide for teachers that will be distributed through Marfan's information-resource center, its national network of specialty medical clinics, and through its extensive national volunteer network.

TEMPORARY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Diana, a Lebanon/Grenada-era veteran and single mother of three, bought her first home when she was able to secure a favorable variable interest rate. With the decline of the housing market and increased interest rates, Diana's monthly payment doubled overnight. No longer able to afford her payment and suddenly in default, Diana discovered the mortgage company would not refinance the loan until she caught up on payments. Temporary Financial Assistance was able to bring her mortgage current, allowing the veteran to refinance her mortgage to an affordable monthly payment.

The American Legion's Temporary Financial Assistance program helps military and veteran families with minor children at home. Through TFA, a local American Legion post can call upon the national organization for cash assistance to help meet basic needs of veterans' children. Funding for TFA comes through The American Legion Endowment Fund. In a record-setting 2008, nearly 1,500 children were helped by the fund, amounting to more than \$705,700 in disbursements from National Headquarters.

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 Korea during its struggle against communist forces during 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.

CHILD WELFARE FOUNDATION

Not all American children grow up with the same opportunities. Some face physical disabilities, parenting problems and even homelessness. For thousands, each day is a challenge marked by pain, prayer and perseverance. Many require specialized care. That is why The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation exists. Established in 1954, the foundation was developed to collect donations from individuals who wished to contribute to the betterment of children in this country. To date, nearly \$10 million has been awarded to organizations to support worthwhile projects through the dissemination of information to the general public and specific target groups. In 2008 the foundation awarded grants totaling \$639,695 to 18 nonprofit organizations. Among those grants was \$40,000 for the Children's Organ Transplant Association of Bloomington, Ind., for their project "Miracle Makers: COTA Volunteers in Action." This grant will provide opportunities for COTA patients across the country to raise awareness of the need for more organ and tissue donors. Other 2008 grants went to such groups as the Huntington's Disease Society of America, KidsPeace, The Progeria Research Foundation, Crohn's & Colitis Foundation of America, and Our Military Kids, Inc.

www.legion.org/cwf/



PROTECTING AMERICA'S GREATEST COMMODITY

Gayle Langan and the rest of the newly chartered American Legion Riders Chapter 150 in Sainte Genevieve, Mo., didn't let a struggling economy discourage them when they found out a home for at-risk girls was in danger of closing. The Riders and Post 150 took it upon themselves to raise the money needed to keep the home open and make a huge difference in the lives of its residents.

Langan, a 25-year Air Force veteran and Legionnaire since 2007, found out about the home's dire situation in August 2008. The Missouri Girls Town was founded in 1953 and provides residential and outpatient opportunities for abused and neglected girls ages 8 to 21. The facility had failed a sewer inspection by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. A newer, larger system was required to be put into place, at a cost of \$120,000, and failure to do so would result in closure of the home. Chances were, the home's residents were either going to be put back into the difficult domestic situations they came from or placed into foster care.

The Missouri Girls Town was able to raise \$35,000 on its own, but its applications for grants to cover the remainder of the cost were denied. Word of the desperate situation reached Langan; she and the Riders were determined to keep the home operating.

"I waited until we had our first (Legion Riders) meeting to present this," Langan said. "I threw this out there and said we needed to do something. Getting everyone to agree was easy. I didn't have to beat anyone over the head. Kids were in trouble, and The American Legion Riders are about helping kids."

What started off as a \$1,000 donation began to snowball. The Riders put weekly articles in the paper about their fundraising efforts. They spoke at the local radio station to promote their efforts. And for three weeks, they rode to other Legion posts, local businesses and others willing to donate to the cause. Businesses donated items to be raffled off.

"The businesses were so generous. They all donated so much stuff," Langan said. "They knew these kids were in trouble, and they didn't want them going back into a bad situation."

On Sept. 27, the Riders conducted a Poker Run with stops at Legion posts in Missouri and Illinois, and the ensuing raffle of items donated by area businesses took more than two hours. With the fundraising effort finished, the Riders tallied up the donations; between them and Post 150, more than \$75,000 was raised.

But the real pay-off, Langan said, came when they took the money to the home.

"Nine of us rode our bikes 305 miles to the home, which was having an open house to raise awareness about their situation," she said. "The home knew we'd raised money, but they had no idea how much. When we announced it, the kids in the hall started to scream. And they started to hug us. I've never gotten so many hugs in my life. I'll never get as many hugs as I did that day."

The sewer system is now up and running, and the home honored the Riders by naming the fundraising effort the "American Legion Riders Chapter 150 Rescue Project." Langan said the chapter has sort of adopted the home as a pet project, and followed up their generous donation by building 19 bookcases as a Christmas present for the home.



MEDIA OF THE AMERICAN LEGION



Other Resources

American Legion National Headquarters publishes dozens of brochures on programs such as The American Legion School Award Medal Program, Boys State, Employment Service Awards and others. Many of the brochures are available for download from The American Legion Web site.

www.legion.org/whatsnew/publicrelations/publications

THE AMERICAN LEGION MAGAZINE

In addition to being a general-interest publication covering national and international issues, *The American Legion Magazine* also features articles that promote the growth of American Legion programs, understanding of American Legion values, and a sense of esprit de corps and pride in being a veteran and member of the organization. America's leaders speak to America on the pages of *The American Legion Magazine*.

THE AMERICAN LEGION DISPATCH

The purpose of the *Dispatch* is to provide information about programs, legislative issues and veterans affairs to the department, district and post level. The *Dispatch* also highlights programs and events from the department, district and post level that can be used as a model of success for anyone in the organization.

To subscribe, go to <https://join.legion.org/magazines/?mag=Dispatch>

THE AMERICAN LEGION ONLINE UPDATE

E-mailed weekly, the *Online Update* provides up-to-date information on Legion programs and issues pertinent to members of The American Legion family, including breaking stories regarding national security, Congress and the Department of Veterans Affairs. To sign up for the *Online Update*, go to www.legion.org/whatsnew/publications/newsletter.

LEGION.ORG

The American Legion's national Web site features information on every Legion program, stories about the work being done by Legionnaires in the field, and links to other Web sites of interest to veterans and servicemembers, along with their families.

AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL CONTACTS

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

(202) 861-2700
var@legion.org

Economics

(202) 861-2700
econ@legion.org

Legislative

(202) 263-2981
leg@legion.org

National Security/Foreign Relations

(202) 861-2700
nsfr@legion.org

Americanism/Children & Youth

(317) 630-1203
acy@legion.org

Public Relations

(317) 630-1253
pr@legion.org

The American Legion Magazine

(317) 630-1298
magazine@legion.org

The American Legion Online Update

(317) 630-1272
eltr@legion.org





THE AMERICAN LEGION

P.O. Box 1055
Indianapolis, IN 46206
(317) 630-1200
www.legion.org