Americanism is an ideal of loyal patriotism, religious tolerance, righteous freedom, fearless courage, honest integrity, abiding faith in the commanding destiny of the United States, and a fathomless love for the principles that led our forefathers to found this country. During the past year, the Americanism Commission continued to offer a variety of programs and activities to give recognition to the ideal of human values, and the dignity and worth of the individual. These programs and activities embrace many aspects of an individual’s relationship to his or her community, state and nation.

Following is a summary of the commission’s activities:

Committee on Children & Youth
Herbert J. Petit, Jr.
Louisiana
Chairman

Since The American Legion’s inception, members have realized a need to care for and to protect our nation’s most valuable resource – our children. The purpose of the Americanism Commission’s Committee on Children & Youth is to formulate, recommend and implement plans, programs and activities designed to:

• Assure care and protection for the children of veterans.
• Improve conditions for all children and youth, with due concern for maintaining the integrity of the family home.
• Prevent social and physical ills of children and youth where possible.
• Maintain a balanced program that provides for their physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual needs.

Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA): Through our Temporary Financial Assistance program, a post may call upon The American Legion for financial assistance to help meet the basic needs (shelter, food, utilities, and medical) of veterans’ children when the parents are unable to do so. It is important to note that while the veteran must have served honorably on active duty during a designated war period, the veteran does not have to be a member of The American Legion to receive assistance. Last year we granted over $824,087 to veterans’ families and touched the lives of 1,455 children. These funds afforded 631 veterans’ families with food, clothing and shelter, thus preserving the integrity of the family home.

Youth Suicide Prevention: The American Legion is very concerned about the welfare of our nation’s youth and a major problem that threatens them. Among adolescents, ages 10-24, suicide continues to be the third leading cause of death, and the second leading cause of death for ages 15-24. Approximately 5,000 American youth take their own lives every year. Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem and may be prevented.
Halloween Safety: As long as Halloween activities are sponsored and promoted in our various communities by duly appointed and elected officials, The American Legion believes children and parents should know how to make this observance as safe as possible. To assist with this effort, the Legion distributes a brochure, entitled “Make Halloween a Safe and Fun Night” to educate children and parents about trick-or-treat safety.

The American Legion is proud of its accomplishments on behalf of our country's youth. Dedication to improving the lives of children has never wavered and will continue with the Committee on Children & Youth, to ensure that The American Legion will do everything possible to perpetuate “A Square Deal For Every Child.” This remains the ultimate goal and definitive challenge for the years ahead.

Committee on Youth Education
Mike Bredeck
Minnesota
Chairman

Since our founding in 1919, The American Legion has continuously advocated greater program activity in the area of education. The American Legion believes that education is the cornerstone upon which the future of our nation is built. In keeping with this credo, activities during the past year have focused on improving and maintaining a stronger relationship between American Legion posts and schools in their communities.

Widely recognized throughout the country as the premiere authority on issues concerning the flag of the United States, The American Legion has produced “For Which It Stands,” a DVD about the history, significance and meaning of our flag, and proper respect and care for it. “For Which It Stands” is designed primarily for students in upper elementary, middle or junior high schools. The DVD is available from Emblem Sales (Stock No. 755.400) for $9.95, plus shipping and handling.

The Americanism Commission continues to actively promote and solicit contributions to the American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund, established by The American Legion to assist the children of U.S. military personnel who die while serving on active duty on or after Sept. 11, 2001. Resolution No. 1 The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Enhancement was adopted at the 2016 spring meetings of the National Executive Committee. This will now make the scholarship available to an additional class of recipients – children of Post-9/11 veterans with disability rating of no less than 50% as assigned by the Department of Veteran Affairs. Children of fallen Post-9/11 service members will remain the first priority for scholarships. Additionally, an expansion of funds available to award each year will allow for greater individual scholarships of up to $20,000 per annum. These changes will be effective with the 2017 award year. This year, 31 American Legion Legacy scholarships were awarded totaling $49,972. Recipients were: (FIRST-TIME) Dennis Jallah (NC), Chelsea Briggs (HI), Faith Martin (TN), Kyana Goodman (FL), Mike Hobart (NY), Jetta Greene (KS), Alexander Menke (KS), Brody Pristap (MI), Ashlyn McCain (TX), Justin Mariano (CA), Angelika Henderson (NC), Nia Tolbert (KS), Alyssa Hill (TN), Willie Bryant, III (SC), John Colman, II (NC), Elijah Harris (MD), Kevin Curry (WA) / (RENEWALS) Alexis Baker (AR), Chris Kimmerly (NY), Paige Hobart (NY), Karina Bertolino (CA), Jason Bertolino (CA), Jacob Martin (TN), Craig Thurber (KS), Kenneth Wilder (VA), Peter Witt (OH), Shane Sexton (SC), Mackenzie Lilley (PA), Laura DuPont (IL), Sean McVey (WV), Donovan Caldwell (IA)

Contributions may be sent to The American Legacy Scholarship Fund, PO Box 361626, Indianapolis, IN 46236-1626, or online @ www.legion.org/donate.

Information about all scholarships offered by the national organization may be obtained by visiting legion.org/scholarships or by emailing legioned@legion.org.
Other events during the past year:

- The Samsung American Legion Scholarship Program continued to make awards, distributing more than $5.49 million to students since its inception in 1996.
- The Samsung American Legion Scholars Recognition was held in Washington, D.C., June 6-8, 2016. The national Scholars were each awarded a $20,000 scholarship and honored on Capitol Hill with a special breakfast hosted by Samsung and The American Legion.
- Thanks to a generous grant from Samsung Electronics America, Inc., The American Legion is developing establishment of a Samsung American Legion Alumni Association and hired an Assistant Director of Alumni Program Development. An executive committee is in place, and dozens of past scholarship alumni are being engaged on our social media platforms as development continues.
- The American Legion renewed its commitment to the changing landscape of education in America by updating its official policy on education.
- The American Legion published the Education Development Guide for posts, districts, chapters and departments which will serve as a guide for becoming more knowledgeable about education in the 21st century; the guide provides numerous strategies for engaging with community schools and establishing strong education programs at a grassroots level.

American Legion Baseball Committee
Gary Stone
Missouri
Chairman

This year marks the 91st season for American Legion Baseball. The 2016 World Series was played August 11-16 on Veterans Field at Keeter Stadium in Shelby, North Carolina, home of the American Legion Baseball World Series, and was hosted by Post 82.

- Games 1-12 of the 2016 World Series were streamed live online via ESPN3. In addition, the semi-finals games on Monday and “Championship Tuesday” were broadcast on ESPNU. In 2015, viewership for all three of the ESPNU games exceeded 272,000 viewers, which marked a steep increase from the previous year.

- The American Legion Baseball team from Chapin-Newberry, S.C., sponsored by Post 193, won the 2015 American Legion Baseball World Series. As national champions, the team was invited to attend the 2015 Major League Baseball World Series in Kansas City as guests of The American Legion and Major League Baseball.

- Justin Hawkins, playing for the Chapin-Newberry team, is the 2015 George W. Rulon Player of the Year. He is the 67th American Legion Baseball player to be honored by the National Baseball Hall of Fame in a ceremony over Memorial Day weekend. Sixty-eight members enshrined in the National Baseball Hall of Fame played American Legion Baseball.

- The 2015 American Legion Baseball All-Academic Team, sponsored by Diamond Sports, received eight $2,500 scholarships that were awarded to deserving American Legion Baseball players, and one $5,000 scholarship awarded to the team’s captain. The 2015 All-Academic Team Captain is Joshua Wasilewski of Belmont, Vermont.

- At the 2016 spring meetings, a resolution was adopted to further the promotion of the program by creating a national network of department American Legion Baseball websites which will be launched prior to the 2017 season.
• Ahead of the 2016 season, the American Legion Baseball Subcommittee achieved full committee status. Gary Stone of Missouri was tasked with chairing the committee, replacing long-time subcommittee chairman Larry Price of South Dakota, who announced his retirement as chairman at the 2015 Legion baseball World Series.

Citizenship and Naturalization

The Americanism Commission is committed to promoting understanding, appreciation and active participation in the rights and responsibilities of American citizenship and government. To this end, the commission seeks the successful cultural assimilation of immigrants and lawful residents seeking a legal path to citizenship into local communities. The Americanism Commission strongly urges posts to collaborate with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service to assist in the assimilation process for new and prospective citizens. To further perpetuate good citizenship, the commission encourages posts to promote the Get Out the Vote program, which encourages all eligible voters to register to vote and to cast ballots in all elections at the local, state and federal levels.

Troop and Family Support

Family Support Network (FSN): Since September 11, 2001, National Guard and Reserve units have been activated in record numbers. The families of these men and women often find themselves unable to meet normal monthly household obligations. The American Legion maintains nationwide Family Support Network toll-free support, 1-800-504-4098, for service personnel and their families who are affected by deployment and activation. An online application for assistance is located at www.legion.org/familysupport. All requests are referred to community posts, who then contact the military member or their family, to determine and address their specific needs. As the nation’s largest veterans organization, our commitment to the men and women of our armed forces and their families is absolute.

Operation Comfort Warriors: The purpose of Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW) is to provide items, activities and events to wounded, injured and ill service members and their families that allows for aid, comfort and empowerment over their condition as well as transitional assistance. During 2015, OCW disbursed $295,869 in 35 grants that provided comfort to 7,632 wounded warriors and their families and an estimated 13,500 personnel were impacted in an indirect manner from seeing the grants presented. Despite drastic reductions in military activations and deployments, wounded warriors still have special needs that The American Legion continues to address through its Operation Comfort Warriors program. Requests for OCW assistance can be made at www.legion.org/ocw.

Youth Activities

Programs for our nation’s youth continue to help thousands reach their potential by building physical, mental and moral alertness while cultivating strong character and fostering civic responsibility. Activities and events of the past year included the following:

• Benjamin Crosby of Burlington, Washington, representing Post 91, won the 2016 National High School Oratorical Contest and an $18,000 college scholarship. Solomon Brown of Greenwood, Mississippi, representing Post 200, placed second and received a $16,000 scholarship. Cheyenne Mathews of Ketchikan, Alaska, representing Post 3, placed third and received a $14,000 scholarship.

• Jacob Kelley of Cottage Grove, Wisconsin, is the 2016 American Legion Eagle Scout of the Year and the recipient of a $10,000 scholarship. Runners-up and recipients of $2,500 scholarships are Jeremiah Lovestrand from Floral, Florida; Liam O’Conner from Wyoming, Delaware and Jacob Quigley from Bourbonnais, Illinois.
In the preliminary rounds, 1,503 athletes entered the individual competition and 203 teams entered the team competition of the 2015 American Legion Junior Air Rifle National Postal Tournament. At the 2015 National Championship, the Francis Redington Sportsmanship award was presented to Howard Norrish, Winthrop Harbor, Illinois, Zion Benton High School, shooting for Post 865.

Rhiann Travis of Poolville, Texas, shooting for Post 163, and Adam McClintock of Tucson, Arizona, shooting for Post 7, captured the 2015 Precision and Sporter championships respectively.

The Americanism Commission is concerned that in today’s society law enforcement is not always regarded with the respect it deserves. The Commission further recognizes that The American Legion Youth Cadet Law Enforcement program is an excellent vehicle through which young people are empowered to realize early on that peace officers stand as staunch supporters for moral and legal rights, and that the dedication and impact they have in local communities, state, and nation should be regarded with respect and appreciation. The program also serves as an influential stepping stone in life for high school students considering a career in law enforcement as they experience those professional practices and concepts first-hand during their week-long experience at a state police training academy. Departments are encouraged to work with their state police or other law enforcement organizations to develop a Youth Cadet Law Enforcement Program. A promotional video urging departments to establish a Youth Cadet Law Enforcement Program can be found on the Legion website at www.legion.org/juniorlaw/resources. Nineteen departments currently sponsor a Youth Cadet Law Enforcement Program: Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Vermont and Virginia.

American Legion Boys State, one of the most respected and selective educational programs of government instruction for high school students, celebrated its 81st anniversary this summer. In 2015, 19,449 young men participated in 49 Boys State programs.

Aravind Byju of Fernandina Beach, Florida, and Peter Spectre of Belfast, Maine, were elected President and Vice President respectively of American Legion 2015 Boys Nation.

Just over 588 American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion members have been awarded The American Legion and Scouting Square Knot Award since its inception in 2003, recognizing active involvement in The American Legion’s Scouting programs.

Summary

This year-end report reflects only a small part of the work carried out by The American Legion’s Americanism Commission. Posts, districts and departments expend much more time, effort and money as they accept the challenges of sponsoring and conducting Americanism activities that foster wide-ranging community service, youth development and educational advancement.