

**The  
American  
Legion**



*For God and country*

## ***Suggested Speech***

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# **The American Legion 92nd Birthday 2011**

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It was a different era, but the face of war was as horrifying as ever. Trench warfare, mustard gas and what was then called “shell shock” took their toll on many of our World War I dough boys.

Newspapers in the United States reported incidents of disabled veterans, starving and ignored by the government, collapsing on street corners.

Some communities, not wanting to deal with their disabled warriors, hid them from sight. Major American cities had “ugly ordinances,” which required disfigured people to cover their injuries – even those sustained in war. These heroes were forced to wear masks or hoods in public to conceal their faces or face arrest and imprisonment.

More than 300,000 soldiers returned home with debilitating physical and mental disorders. Having put an enormous amount of its financial resources into mobilizing the army, navy and Marine Corps, the government paid little attention to the problems of rehabilitation or long-term medical care for wounded veterans.

Some lawmakers displayed their insensitivity to those wounded warriors by questioning the moral fiber of disabled veterans who were seeking compensation and financial assistance.

It was during this period of despair and disillusionment for our veterans that The American Legion was born.

In the early days of The American Legion, Past National Commander Hanford MacNider wrote, “The first duty of The American Legion is to see that those men who came back from the service, blind, maimed ... broken in health and spirit ... who must live through the war forever in their homes throughout the country ... get a square deal from the Government they fought for.”

“A square deal” is what President Teddy Roosevelt, the father of one of The American Legion’s legendary founders, promised to all Americans more than a decade earlier. The apple didn’t fall far from the tree – as Teddy Roosevelt Jr., the son of the Rough Rider himself, became a leader and advocate for this new organization called “The American Legion.”

During the formation of The American Legion at the 1919 Paris Caucus, Roosevelt Junior voiced that his only regret was “that my father could not have been alive...to see the action of this body of Americans.”

Among other timeless truths, The American Legion was dedicated to the promotion of “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.”

In The American Legion, a veteran was a veteran regardless of whether they were enlisted or commissioned, black or white, male or female.

In fact, women Legionnaires were able to vote for national commander before they could legally vote for the president of the United States.

Through the Legion's hard work and efforts, the U.S. Veterans Bureau was created - forerunner of the Veterans Administration and later, the Department of Veterans Affairs.

For 92 years now, The American Legion has led the charge as America's leading advocate for veterans health care and rehabilitation, children and youth programs, a strong national security policy and one-hundred percent Americanism.

When the Ku Klux Klan was at the height of its power, The American Legion passed Resolution 407 in 1923. It declared that groups fostering racial, religious or class strife were "un-American, a menace to our liberties," and "inconsistent with the ideals and purposes of The American Legion."

In 1944, Harry W. Colmery (**Comber**), a Legion past national commander, wrote the first draft of what later became the "GI Bill of Rights," the Legion's greatest legislative achievement. It made college educations, home and business loans available to millions of veterans and literally re-defined the American economy.

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

Once again, The American Legion answered the call by championing the rights of today's warriors and calling for improved benefits.

In 2008, U.S. Representative Chet Edwards said the new Post-9/11 GI Bill “would not have happened without The American Legion.”

Over the last few years The American Legion has provided nearly \$1 million in comfort items to our heroes recovering at U.S. military hospitals and warrior transition units worldwide, as part of Operation Comfort Warriors.

We understand that you cannot merely “support the troops,” without supporting their families.

We serve today’s veterans through “Heroes to Hometowns,” a program that provides direct assistance to severely injured servicemembers as they transition back to society.

We also operate a Family Support Network, to help mobilize community resources – such as child care, temporary housing, lawn mowing or any other needs that a military family may be facing.

The American Legion has thrived for 92 years because, while our organization continues to preserve the memories of those who have made great sacrifice, we serve the future of our nation – America's youth.

And, ladies and gentlemen, if you have ever witnessed one of our Oratorical contests or met the youth champions that The American Legion honors every year at our national convention, you know that the future is bright!

Our influence can be seen in the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame, where many of the greatest ballplayers in the world can be counted as veterans of American Legion Baseball.

It can be seen in the halls of Congress, governors' mansions or business communities, where some of the most successful leaders are graduates of American Legion Boys State and Boys Nation.

From teaching flag etiquette to leading the charge to protect Old Glory from desecration, The American Legion is seen as the leading authority and guardian of the Flag of our great nation.

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

This may sound simplistic to some, but the Global War on Terrorism really is a case of good versus evil.

Our enemies are determined to kill as many innocent men, women and children as they can and we must do everything we can to keep them from doing it.

National Defense, Americanism, Veterans and Youth. These are the bedrock principles that made The American Legion a great idea in 1919 and make it a great organization today.

To each of you, I say thank you for your service, for what you do for our veterans and for our country.

May God bless.

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