

**The
American
Legion**



For God and country

Suggested Speech

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The American Legion 90th Birthday 2009

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“If you build it, they will come!” This was the theme of the 1989 film “Field of Dreams,” but it is also a good description of the history of The American Legion.

When a group of World War I veterans built The American Legion 90 years ago, its foundation of service and advocacy supported four solid pillars – a strong national defense, Americanism, support for veterans and mentoring our youth.

Our founders had no way of knowing that their group would one day become the largest and most influential veterans organization on the planet.

Our influence is evident every time a veteran applies for a VA mortgage, GI Bill education benefits or disability compensation. It is evident every year when a new group of American Legion Boys Nation participants meets with the President of the United States.

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.

The American Legion's influence can be found in the wards of Walter Reed and numerous other military hospitals that have received assistance through The American Legion family's Operation Comfort Warriors campaign.

The American Legion is a central player in Blue Star Salutes and other patriotic events held in hundreds of communities across our great nation every year.

We are there when natural disasters hit, awarding National Emergency Fund grants often within a few short days of the request.

We care about the young people whose parents have made the ultimate sacrifice during the war on terror. The American Legion's Legacy Scholarship Fund was created to help pay for the college educations of those who lost a military parent serving since 9/11.

The American Legion influence is found everywhere – in local posts, the halls of Congress, VA centers and places like Bagram and Baghdad, where today's warriors proudly continue the tradition of military service forged by earlier generations of Legionnaires.

Through our Heroes to Hometowns program, The American Legion works with the Department of Defense to provide help to those who need to re-establish their lives when they come home.

Another way The American Legion supports the troops is by assisting their families while they are deployed. Whether it's mowing a lawn or shopping for groceries, the American Legion's Family Support Network stands ready to assist those in need.

The American Legion has supported the Boy Scouts of America since 1919 and today charters 2,700 Scouting units comprising more than 73,000 young men and women.

We support our nation's youth not just because they represent one of our four founding pillars, but because they are our future.

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 would know that the future is bright!

Our founders and their successors have built a grand American institution and people have come!

Our doors have been open to all wartime veterans since the beginning. Women veterans were eligible to vote for National Commander of The American Legion before they were legally permitted to vote for president of the United States.

In 1923, long before the civil rights movement and when hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan wielded unspeakable influence on the times, The American Legion passed Resolution 407. In it we affirmed that those who foster racial, religious or class strife among our people, or who take the law into their own hands are a menace to our liberties, and destructive to our fundamental law. Such action was considered then as it is now, to be inconsistent with the ideals and purposes of The American Legion. In short, The American Legion stated in 1923 what it believes today, that racism is un-American.

The American Legion believes not only in what is right for America, we believe that it is our mission to serve America. In fact, The American Legion believes service trumps membership. Even so, it is essential that we tell people about our great organization and that we make all eligible veterans feel welcome.

Membership is the lifeblood of our organization and without our members, there would be no one to operate the programs that enable us to serve America so well.

If you build it, they will come, but they must know about it!

Tell your friends, neighbors and fellow veterans that not only did The American Legion write what became the greatest piece of social legislation ever enacted by Congress – the original GI Bill – but that The American Legion strongly lobbied for passage of the Post-911 Veterans Education Assistance Act, which will enable the current generation of veterans to pursue higher education.

The American Legion also championed the pre-eminent study of the effects of Agent Orange exposure on our Vietnam veterans, which was later presented to Congress and the White House. The American Legion helped put Agent Orange and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder on the Washington radar.

We supported the construction of the Vietnam War Memorial with our words and our wallets, raising \$1 million in 1982 – more than any other organization. We were major fund raisers for the national World War II and Korean War Memorials and formed a Persian Gulf Task Force to enhance our service to Gulf War veterans.

Legionnaires can be proud of the many accomplishments during our organization's 90 years of service to America.

As it has been since our founding, citizens of this great nation know that when America calls, American Legionnaires will continue to say “At your service!”

Our founders would be very pleased at what this organization has accomplished since 1919.

Legionnaires have built it, and many have come.

But this organization has never and will never rest on its laurels. To quote an old tune, and I feel it, “The best is yet to come!”

God Bless you and God Bless America!

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