



THE AMERICAN LEGION  
*Veterans Strengthening America*

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

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**Suggested Remarks for  
The American Legion  
103rd Birthday  
March 15-17, 2022**

The American Legion National Headquarters  
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One hundred and three years ago, The American Legion was founded in Paris, France, the “City of Lights,” by a group of committed U.S. veterans of the Great War. It has been a shining light for communities around the world ever since.

The American Legion was a figurative light for the Unknown Soldier who was given a prominent tomb in 1921 thanks to the tireless efforts of Representative Hamilton Fish, Jr., an American Legion founder. Congressman Fish understood that for America to remain free, it must honor and remember the brave.

The American Legion became a literal light for the Tomb in 1969, when it gifted \$200,000 for the monument to be permanently illuminated.

That's who The American Legion is – an organization of wartime veterans that understands the darkness of combat, while providing light to the communities and country that we love and pledge to defend.

We were a light to our wounded comrades when we insisted on a Veterans Bureau that would treat their medical needs. When the bureau fell short, we pushed for the creation of the Veterans Administration and ultimately, the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Our service officers continue to provide a guiding light for veterans as they assist these men and women in obtaining benefits that they earned while defending our nation.

The American Legion also delivers on President Lincoln's promise of care to the widows and orphans of those who have borne the battle.

Our American Legion founders had hoped that World War One would truly be “the War to “End All Wars,” but they also understood that America must always be strong and vigilant.

Defense was not only a shining pillar of The American Legion but it was a constitutional responsibility, as the nation’s largest veterans organization would constantly remind our nation’s presidents and lawmakers.

But it is still at the local level – in communities across the United States and even overseas – where The American Legion’s light shines brightest.

The U.S. Flag is displayed prominently, proudly and professionally in accordance with a code produced out of American Legion-led conferences that convened in 1923 and 1924.

To the Legion, Americanism encompasses far more than flying the flag, however. It is civic engagement, voting and encouraging good citizenship and patriotism.

Home-ownership, higher education and meaningful employment can all factor into living the American dream – a dream that was possible for millions courtesy of the GI Bill.

Often called the greatest legislation ever passed by Congress, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 was The American Legion's plan to ensure that returning World War II veterans could transition into a productive society rather than a second Great Depression.

Not all veterans groups were onboard with what they feared was an expensive welfare project. The American Legion, more than any other organization, understood that veterans were not looking for hand-outs, just opportunity.

It has been estimated that the GI Bill returned \$7 to the economy for every dollar invested in veterans.

The GI Bill educated eight million World War II veterans, producing some 450,000 engineers, 240,000 accountants, 238,000 educators, 91,000 scientists, 67,000 doctors and 22,000 dentists.

Seventy-seven years later, a new generation of veterans and their families continue to benefit from modern versions of this landmark legislation.

The American Legion led the fight for the government to recognize and care for veterans who have experienced the effects of Agent Orange, radiation poisoning and other toxic exposures that occurred during military service.

The American Legion shines a light on issues such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, homelessness, military sexual trauma and other issues that some would prefer not to discuss. We do this because we owe it to those who have served.

Throughout natural disasters, global pandemics and local emergencies, it is The American Legion post that often shines brightest.

With programs like the National Emergency Fund, the Veterans & Children Foundation, the Legacy Scholarship and Operation Comfort Warriors, The American Legion is able to provide a safety-net to fellow Americans in need. According to the most recent statistics by the Department of Veterans Affairs, more than 17 veterans a day take their own lives. But these men and women are not just statistics. They are our parents, spouses, children and siblings. They are our friends. They are our fellow Legionnaires.

National Commander Paul Dillard was elected on a platform of “No Veteran Left Behind.” He asks each of us to check on each other. Anybody who has served in the military understands the esprit de corps and family bonds that we shared with those whom we served beside. The American Legion gets it. We understand. By calling and reaching out to other veterans, we can be their light. We can be their sounding board. We can listen to their pain. And most importantly, we can save their lives.

Buddy checks are not simply a Legion campaign. It is a peer support program that is spreading throughout the veterans community.

The American Legion also shines a light on the future – the youth of America.

More than 3,000 American Legion Baseball teams serve nearly 50,000 young athletes in the United States and Canada. While the quality of play is high, Legion Baseball puts an even greater emphasis on sportsmanship, citizenship and fair play. Eighty-two National Baseball Hall of Famers have played American Legion Baseball since its founding in 1925.

Through American Legion Boys State and Boys Nation – and the American Legion Auxiliary Girls State and Girls Nation – the United States has benefited from outstanding public servants, business leaders, cultural icons and other success stories.

The American Legion Junior Shooting Sports Program attracts 1,400 people annually to compete in clubs that emphasize gun-safety and marksmanship.

The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program not only develops great speaking skills, but it requires participants to focus on the U.S. Constitution.

By supporting veterans, defense, America and our nation's youth, The American Legion has replicated the 1919 lights of Paris through more than 12,000 American Legion posts across the United States today.

May those lights shine eternally and may God continue to bless our American Legion through this birthday and many more.

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