

**The
American
Legion**



For God and country

Suggested Speech

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The American Legion 93rd Birthday 2012

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There is a memorable scene at the end of “Saving Private Ryan,” in which a dying Captain Miller tells Private Ryan to, quote – Earn this – unquote.

It was his way of reminding the private that heroic men had given their lives for him and that he owed it to them to live a good and moral life.

In a sense, that is exactly what The American Legion is asking all of us to do. For we all owe an enormous debt to the fallen men and women who died defending this great country.

This debt was very much on the minds of The American Legion founders when they gathered in Paris just a few months after the end of World War I. They did not form the organization out of self-interest. They did it to serve their comrades, their communities and their country.

The bedrock of their existence would revolve around four pillars – a strong national defense, Americanism, support for veterans and mentoring our youth.

Today, The American Legion doesn't just recite these pillars. We live them.

For instance, The American Legion is on the record as strongly opposing military cuts that would compromise our security and add additional burdens to our already overworked fighting force.

We believe that the best way to attract young men and women to the military is to award pay and benefits that reflect their outstanding service and sacrifice. Moreover, we believe it is equally important to take care of the families of those who serve in uniform – for they too are carrying an enormous burden, which often includes frequent moves, long separations and the worry that their loved one may never return home.

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

We promote Americanism by fighting to ensure that the flag of the United States is constitutionally protected from desecration.

If it's revered enough to place on a hero's coffin, it is important enough to protect from physical desecration.

Congress should not stand with the One Percent who disrespect Old Glory but with the 99 percent who do revere it.

It often takes a veteran to remind the public of the sacrifices those in uniform and their families continue to make. The American Legion is a central player in Blue Star Salutes and other patriotic and troop-support events held in hundreds of communities across our great nation every year.

We continue to serve veterans even when the fighting ends. Past National Commander Harry Colmery, the author of America's greatest piece of social legislation, knew that it was right for America to aid returning war veterans by making it possible for them to obtain formal educations, get jobs and purchase homes.

While others scoffed that such a benefit would "break the treasury," The American Legion held firm and ensured the passage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill of Rights.

But The American Legion did not rest on its laurels, even after that significant and historical accomplishment.

We played a pivotal role in the creation of the new post-9/11 GI Bill, which allows recent veterans to transfer their benefits to family members if they choose to do so.

The American Legion has thousands of service officers deployed across the country – all eager to assist any veteran with a benefit claim, free of charge, regardless of Legion membership.

We are there when natural disasters hit, awarding National Emergency Fund grants to Legion members and their posts, often within a few short days of the request.

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 families in need.

We show our appreciation to wounded, injured and ill servicemembers through Operation Comfort Warriors, which has provided more than \$1 million of gifts to our wounded warriors since 2007.

The American Legion also championed the pre-eminent study of the effects of Agent Orange exposure on 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 Veterans 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.

The American Legion serves the youth of America with outstanding programs such as American Legion Baseball, Junior Shooting Sports, Boys State, Boys Nation, and the High School Oratorical contest.

The American Legion has supported the Boy Scouts of America since 1919 and, today, along with the American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion, charters more than 2,600 Scouting units comprised of nearly 70,000 young men and women.

And our support has made a difference to the recipients of The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation grants, which are used to educate the public about childhood diseases such as juvenile diabetes, Marfan Syndrome and autism.

We also support the Children's Miracle Network, and that support has undoubtedly saved countless young lives.

The American Legion does these things not because it can, but because it's who we are.

In short, like Private Ryan we are "Earning This."

Ladies and gentlemen, to give you an idea of why The American Legion exists and why we proudly observe the birthday of this great organization, let us reflect on the Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion.

“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 good will 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.”

Legionnaires can be proud of the many accomplishments during our organization’s 93 years of service to America.

As it has been since our founding, when America calls, American Legionnaires will continue to do as Captain Miller implored. Through service, we will justify the sacrifices made. We will “Earn this.”

God Bless you and God Bless America!

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