

Significant dates in American Legion history

1919

March 15-17

Members of the American Expeditionary Force convene in Paris for the first American Legion caucus.

May 8-10

St. Louis Caucus. "The American Legion" is adopted as the organization's official name. The Legion's draft preamble and constitution are approved.

June 9

The National Executive Committee adopts the Legion emblem.

Sept. 16

U.S. Congress charters The American Legion.

Nov. 10-12

First American Legion convention convenes in Minneapolis. Constitution and preamble are adopted. Delegates vote 361-323 to locate the Legion's national headquarters in Indianapolis instead of Washington. A resolution is passed in support of Boy Scouts of America. Today, the Legion is the chartering agency for more than 1,700 Scouting units comprised of approximately 64,000 youths.

1920s

Aug. 9, 1921

The American Legion's efforts result in the creation of the U.S. Veterans Bureau, forerunner of the Veterans Administration. Today, the Legion continues to lobby for adequate funding to cover medical, disability, education and other veterans benefits.

June 15, 1923

The first "Flag Code" is drafted during a Legion conference in Washington. Congress adopts the code in 1942. Today, the Legion is at the forefront of efforts to pass a constitutional amendment to protect the U.S. flag from physical desecration.

July 17, 1925

The Legion creates the American Legion Baseball program. Currently, more than 50 percent of Major League Baseball players are graduates of the program. About 100,000 youths play on Legion-sponsored teams each year.

1930s

June 23, 1935

The first American Legion Boys State convenes in Springfield, Ill., to help youths gain an understanding of the structure and operation of the federal government. The first Boys Nation, bringing together youth leadership from all the Boys State programs, convenes in 1946.

June 1, 1938

The final round of The American Legion's first annual National High School Oratorical Contest is conducted in Norman, Okla. Today, more than 25,000 high-school students from around the country compete annually in the contest, which promotes a greater understanding of the U.S. Constitution. Winners receive thousands of dollars in college scholarships.

1940s

Dec. 15, 1943

Former National Commander Harry W. Colmery starts to write in longhand, on Mayflower Hotel stationery in Washington, the first draft of what will later become the "GI Bill of Rights" – considered to be the Legion's single-greatest legislative achievement.

June 22, 1944

President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs into law the original GI Bill, or Servicemen's Readjustment Act", ushering in monumental changes in U.S. society. Higher education becomes democratized after 8 million veterans go to school

on the GI Bill, get better jobs, buy houses in the suburbs and raise families. For every dollar spent on educating veterans, the U.S. economy eventually gets \$7 back.

May 29, 1946

The Legion and its Auxiliary present a small, struggling organization called the American Heart Association with a \$50,000 grant. The grant inaugurates a nationwide program for the study, prevention and treatment of rheumatic heart disease.

1950s

May 4, 1950

The Legion votes to contribute funds to the field of mental health, thereby playing a key role in launching the National Association for Mental Health.

July 9, 1954

The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation is formed. Since then, \$10 million has been awarded to youth organizations and projects designed to help America's children.

1960s

Sept. 1, 1966

The Legion voices great concern over the fate of prisoners of war in Vietnam. Today, the Legion urges a full accounting of prisoners of war and troops missing in action. The Legion has formed a special group from among the nation's major veterans organizations to continue pressing for further resolution of this issue.

Aug. 24, 1969

The Legion's National Executive Committee establishes the National Emergency Fund as a result of the effects of Hurricane Camille.

1970s

May 1, 1972

The Legion implements a Halloween safety program for children; it remains the only national program of its kind.

April 1, 1975

The American Legion-sponsored Freedom Bell goes on board the Freedom Train during its tour of the country, in celebration of the U.S. Bicentennial. Six years later, the Freedom Bell is dedicated at its permanent home in Columbus Plaza, opposite Union Station in Washington.

1980s

Aug. 26, 1982

The Legion presents a \$1 million check to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund for construction of "The Wall" in Washington, becoming the largest single contributor to the project.

July 21, 1983

The Legion announces its sponsorship of an independent study on the effects of exposure to Agent Orange on Vietnam War veterans. Congress receives the results of The American Legion-Columbia University Study of Vietnam-Era Veterans in 1989.

Jan. 1, 1989 The Veterans Administration is elevated to cabinet-level status as the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Legion fought hard for the change, arguing that veterans deserve representation at the highest levels of government.

Oct. 16, 1989

The long-standing objective of the Legion to improve adjudication procedures for veterans' claims is achieved when the U.S. Court of Veterans Appeals becomes operational. Most of the provisions contained in the law creating the court were originally included in the Veterans Reassurance Act, written by the Legion and introduced in Congress in 1988.

1990s

Aug. 2, 1990

The Legion files suit against the federal government for failure to conduct a Congress-mandated study about the effects of Agent Orange on veterans who served in Vietnam.

Oct. 11, 1990

The Legion creates the Family Support Network to assist families of servicemembers deployed for operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in the Middle East. Through local posts, the Family Support Network offers a wide range of assistance, including financial assistance, mowing lawns, baby-sitting and more. Today, the network continues to assist the families affected by military activation and deployment..

June 15, 1991

The Legion hosts its first annual Junior Shooting Sports National Air Rifle Championships at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo. Each year, more than 600 high-school students enter the contest, which teaches gun safety and marksmanship.

Aug. 24, 1994

The Legion announces creation of the Citizens Flag Alliance, a coalition of organizations and individual citizens united to work for a constitutional amendment to protect the U.S. flag from desecration. Since 1995, the amendment has passed in the House by a super majority six times: in 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003 and 2005. In 2006, the amendment fell one vote short of passage in the Senate.

Oct. 1, 1995

The Legion forms its Persian Gulf Task Force to enhance service for the newest generation of wartime veterans, thousands of whom suffer from illnesses linked to their service in the region.

Sept. 16, 1996

The American Legion awards a \$20,000 college scholarship to each of the 10 inaugural Samsung American Legion high school scholars..

June 11, 1997

The National Emergency Fund surpasses the \$1 million mark in cash grants given to flood victims who belong to the Legion family. Most grant recipients reside in the flood plains of Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Minnesota and North Dakota.

Sept. 3, 1997

The Legion presents its first National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year award to Cpl. William T. Rhodes of Huntington, Pa., at the 79th National Convention in Orlando, Fla.

2000s**March 29, 2000**

Senate Joint Resolution 14, the constitutional amendment that would return the people's right to protect the U.S. flag from desecration, falls four votes short of the necessary 67 to override a presidential veto.

Nov. 2002

The American Legion launches the national "I Am Not A Number" campaign to identify and document the delays veterans face in obtaining medical care from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Aug. 2005

Delegates at the 87th National Convention unanimously voice their support for the global war on terrorism with Resolution 169.

June 30, 2008

President George W. Bush signs into law the Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act, a new GI Bill strongly supported by the Legion. The bill renews the federal government's commitment to veterans by providing them with substantially better education benefits. The Legion remains at the forefront of efforts to improve education and other benefits for all veterans. The Post 9/11 GI Bill took effect Aug. 1, 2009, and sent an unprecedented number of veterans to college.