

Pillar 3: Americanism

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The nation's cultural, moral and patriotic values have been under attack for decades, a disheartening trend that continues today. Prayer has been removed from schools. The U.S. Flag is no longer protected from desecration. The Boy Scouts of America have faced serious legal challenges in some communities they serve. Immigration laws are defied. References to God on U.S. currency, in the Pledge of Allegiance and on public monuments have been challenged by a minority of voices whose vision for America is far different than that of our founding fathers.

The American Legion is an organization dedicated to God and country, with a membership of military veterans who take deep pride in the U.S. Flag and all that it means. Since its inception nearly 100 years ago, the Legion has been a stalwart champion of patriotic values, morals, culture and citizenship. The Legion's pillar of Americanism embodies its devotion to law and order, the raising of wholesome youth, an educated and law-abiding citizenship, and respectful observance of patriotic holidays and remembrances.

For the 2012 election year, The American Legion's priorities for Americanism are:

U.S. Flag protocol

The American Legion educates youths on U.S. Flag etiquette to build patriotism and create respect for the flag. The Legion provides education materials that cover a range of topics such as the proper ways to fold, display and dispose of U.S. Flags.

U.S. Flag Protection

The U.S. Constitution should be amended to add the following: "The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States." The Legion joins all of the states and an overwhelming majority of citizens in declaring that the American flag deserves legal protection from acts of public and intentional acts of physical desecration. In 1989, the U.S. Supreme Court declared flag desecration to be a "right" protected by the First Amendment. The Legion disagreed at the time, and now reaffirms its position that flag desecration is a form of conduct – not speech – that can and should be regulated by law.

All 50 state legislatures have petitioned Congress for a constitutional amendment that would give power to Congress to prohibit such conduct. Such an amendment has passed the House of Representatives six times but has fallen short of the two-thirds majority required to pass the Senate (despite polls showing that about 80 percent of Americans support flag protection). The end of the 111th Congress marked only the second time in more than 16 years when there was no floor vote on a flag protection amendment. As a symbol of our nation, the U.S. Flag belongs to the people, who should be given the power to protect it. The Legion's position on its protection is inviolate.

Illegal Immigration

Illegal immigration stands as one of the most serious problems facing America, with millions of illegal immigrants inside our borders, and billions of dollars spent providing them with social services, education and jobs. The American Legion supports legal and manageable immigration. The Legion adamantly opposes illegal immigration, any kind of amnesty for those who enter America illegally, and ineffective measures to prevent illegal border crossings - particularly during a time of war against terrorism and drug trafficking.

The Legion's strategy to combat illegal immigration calls for strong border security, including physical barriers and high-tech surveillance methods; the elimination of economic and social-service benefits for illegal immigrants; employer sanctions against those who knowingly hire illegal immigrants; and the enforcement of existing immigration laws. The Legion also supports new laws that deny drivers' licenses to illegal immigrants, establish parameters for deporting non-criminals, and the designation of English as the official language of the United States. The Legion's position on immigration seeks to eliminate the visa lottery program, create new visa categories for agricultural workers (to replace those working illegally), and authorize the tracking of foreign visitors, including college students, members of the media and the diplomatic corps.

Voter Registration and Participation

The American Legion connects good government with active citizen participation in the electoral process. American Legion posts throughout the country offer their services and facilities to enable voter registration and promote turnout at the polls. Posts also provide facilities and opportunities for nonpartisan voter-education forums and debates.

It is important to note that, under provisions of its federal charter, the Legion is prohibited from supporting, opposing or providing aid to any political party, or any candidate for public office.

Boy Scouts of America

The American Legion vigorously opposes attempts to strip the Boy Scouts of public support, sponsorship and facility space, due to the organization's membership or leadership criteria. The Scouts teach important skills, build character, and provide a healthy and wholesome outlet for young Americans. The organization should not be punished or persecuted for using the term "God" in its oath, or for setting leadership restrictions based on a moral code that the majority of Americans endorse.

The Pledge of Allegiance

Recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance by students and teachers in our nation's schools should be a regular part of school activities and events. In support of keeping "under God" in the Pledge, The American Legion affirms that pledging allegiance to the U.S. Flag is the voluntary offering of a patriotic oath to the nation; no one should be denied this opportunity. The removal of these words will set a precedent that questions the propriety of numerous references to a supreme being in historical documents, on currency, and on many government buildings (including the U.S. Supreme Court).

Establishment Clause Lawsuits

The American Legion is dedicated to combating the secular cleansing of our American heritage, performed through lawsuits that attack the Boy Scouts, the public display of the Ten Commandments and other symbols of America's religious history. The authority given by Congress to the courts to impose damages, or attorney fees, in establishment-clause cases is being used by legal activists to compel municipalities, state and federal agencies, and private groups to cast off all religious association.

Often, these proceedings are based on the pursuit of tax-funded attorney fees. The Legion supports legislation to expressly preclude courts from awarding attorney fees in lawsuits brought to remove or destroy religious symbols.

The Americanism Commission

The American Legion's Americanism Commission is home to numerous programs that provide and foster healthy, wholesome and educational opportunities for young people, including:

American Legion Baseball

Boys Nation and Boys State

The National High School Oratorical Competition

Junior Law Cadet American Legion Junior Shooting Sports

The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund (for children of servicemembers who have died on active duty since Sept. 11, 2001)

Eagle Scout of the Year Scholarship

The Samsung American Legion Scholarship

The "Need a Lift?" college financial aid guide

Flag education

School Medal Awards

Legion Connects Youth to Community, State and Nation

Youth activity programs of The American Legion are designed to stimulate physical, mental and moral growth; cultivate strong character and wholesome ideals with appreciation for our heritage of freedom; and develop a devotion to civic responsibility. Among the Legion's programs for youth are:

High School Oratorical

Students participating in The American Legion's High School Oratorical Scholarship Program gain a deeper knowledge of constitutional principles as they prepare and deliver orations based on some aspect of the U.S. Constitution, with emphasis upon a citizen's duties and obligations to government. Alumni of this Legion program include television news anchor Lou Dobbs and talk-show host Alan Keyes, a former presidential candidate who was the Legion's national oratorical champion and - in the same year - president of the Legion's Boys Nation.

Junior Law Cadet

American Legion Junior Law Cadet is a participative law enforcement vocational learning program that exposes high school students to realistic and demanding training, patterned after authentic recruit training.

Boys State and Boys Nation

Thousands of young men learn the function and powers of government through American Legion Boys State, as they set up and operate their own "governments," fashioned after municipal, county and state structures. Boys State alumni include state legislators, governors, members of Congress, a former vice president and president of the United States, and an associate justice currently sitting on the U.S. Supreme Court. An extension of the Boys State experience is The American Legion Boys Nation. Two outstanding delegates from each Boys State program are selected to represent their state at American Legion Boys Nation, where the young men establish a Boys Nation Senate based upon rules of the U.S. Senate.

Several departments of The American Legion also sponsor County Government Days. For 68 years, the Legion in Nebraska has sponsored such a day across the state, helping high school juniors observe firsthand the workings of local government. Approximately 5,000 students from more than 60 counties participate each year. A partnership with the U.S. Army National Guard in Nebraska helps the Legion cover costs. The American Legion in Kansas sponsors a County Government Day program similar to Boys State, except the government students in each participating high school file for office, campaign and vote in a primary and general election within their school. Students have the opportunity to visit their local courthouse and spend a day learning about duties and responsibilities of county officials. Speakers are heard, and a mock trial is usually observed. The program enjoys cooperation from school and county officials.

The Samsung American Legion Scholarship

After researching dozens of veterans organizations, Samsung Group, a worldwide leader in electronics, chose The American Legion in 1995 to administer an endowed scholarship fund of \$5 million. The endowment was established to show appreciation to U.S. veterans who came to the aid of South Korea during its struggle against Communist forces in the Korean War. The scholarship is for undergraduate study only and may be used for tuition, books, fees, and room and board.

Seven to 10 students are chosen each year for the \$20,000 scholarships, which are awarded to direct descendants of U.S. wartime veterans.

Junior Shooting Sports

The American Legion's Junior Shooting Sports Program provides gun safety and marksmanship training for young people. It is recognized as one of the premier programs in the country, with one of its alumni - Launi Meili - becoming the 1992 Olympic Gold Medalist in Women's Shooting.

American Legion Baseball

Each year, nearly 90,000 athletes participate in American Legion Baseball, the nation's oldest and most-respected amateur baseball program. Legion posts sponsor teams in all 50 states and Puerto Rico, giving young men wholesome, healthy activity and lessons in sportsmanship, loyalty, respect for rules and fair play.

Many of the greatest names in the sport spent their teen-age summers in American Legion Baseball uniforms. Hall of Famers such as Dave Winfield, Rollie Fingers, Reggie Jackson and Yogi Berra still speak of the influence Legion ball has had on their lives and careers. To date, 59 major league players and one umpire who played Legion ball have been inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y.

Berra, the legendary New York Yankees catcher, also served as a gunner's mate in the U.S. Navy during World War II. Although Berra played on teams with Mickey Mantle, Whitey Ford, Roger Maris and other legendary players, he said, "The most fun I ever had playing baseball was when I played American Legion Baseball."