

## ***”This Noble Calling”***

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Like many Veterans I am the recipient of something known as the GI Bill. Veterans will ask me why belong to the American Legion? The answer is quite simple, because of things like the GI Bill. Veterans have a special place in this country and rightfully so. Col. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, the hero of Little Round Top during the Battle of Gettysburg, once said of Veterans and the service they have given to the great nation of ours, that, “they lent a glory to the earth.” The modern Department of Veterans Affairs is as much a result of the battles fought and won by the American Legion, and her sister Veterans organizations, than any other group of Americans. Passing of the legislation known as the Servicemen Readjustment Act of 1944 by Congress, and the signing of said legislation by President Franklin Roosevelt, gave birth to the modern VA, but it was the American Legion who lead the fight that resulted in what we now call VA.

If you are a Veteran ask yourself if you have ever received any of the following benefits: Education and training; guaranteed loans for home, farm, and/or business; review of military discharge; job finding assistance;

unemployment benefits after military service; and treatment at a VA medical facility. If the answer is yes to any of these then you should know that these are the benefits that the American Legion fought to secure for you in 1944. And it wasn't a slam dunk, the Legion had to fight tooth and nail with an evenly divided Congress till the very end --- and this was during World War II!!!

So what is the American Legion? It is really two things. It is a fraternal organization deeply involved in its community and committed to the rehabilitation of our Veterans, a strong national defense, love of country, and the education and betterment of the next generation of Americans. But it is also, and equally important or more so, an advocacy organization for American citizens who followed an ancient and noble calling, and who have worn this nation's uniform. One may think that in this era of good feelings towards our Vets that such things can be taken for granted. This is not the case and we cannot view the present into the past or into the future. A perfect example would be how Congress treated Veterans returning from the jungles of Viet Nam. They were given a greatly reduced education benefit and just thirteen weeks of unemployment benefits and then told to find a job---just like any other civilian occupation, regardless of what they had just experienced. This is in contrast to the World War II returning Veterans who were given a magnificent education package and 52 weeks of unemployment benefits if they needed it. Most did not but it was there just in case.

Not a lot of credit is given to General Omar Bradley who headed the VA from 1945 until 1947, when he became the Army Chief of Staff. It was under Bradley's leadership that VA became what it is today. There are three silos in VA, each with its own Undersecretary. Under the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Deputy Secretary, there is an Undersecretary for the Veterans Health Administration (VA hospitals and Community Based Outpatient Clinics or CBOCs), an Undersecretary for the Veterans Benefits Administration (home loans, education benefits, disability compensation, etc.), and an Undersecretary for the National Cemetery Administration. The NCA is over all VA cemeteries and also provides items like headstones to state Veterans cemeteries.

Veterans have come to take these things for granted but these were the result of many hard fought battles that the American Legion fought on behalf of our nation's finest. America's youngest Veterans need to know this, not just for their own benefit but for the American Legion that they in turn will pass on to those who follow them. At present, the American Legion is a graying organization that needs to be more proactive in recruiting our newest Vets. In keeping with this I propose that the Legion establish, at the national level, a permanent standing committee, with membership on the National Executive Committee, whose sole purpose is to educate and recruit Veterans under 40 years of age. They should be fully funded by National with the simple charge to be *innovative, aggressive*, and

*results driven*. It may not be apparent to them but they need the American Legion and the American Legion needs them.

Without a Veterans advocate organization Veterans benefits would not be there. Why join the American Legion? Because without it America would not have half of the gifts that Veterans bring to their local community, their states, and their nation. The National Conference on Citizenship, American Express, and the Points of Light Foundation in 2015 released a study on Veteran citizens and non-veteran citizens and the results are a little astounding.

- Veterans volunteer within the community more than non-vets
- Veterans are more likely to attend community meetings, fix problems in the neighborhood, and fill leadership roles than non-vets
- 17.7% of Veterans are involved in civic groups, compared to just 5.8% of non-vets
- Veterans vote at a higher rate than non-vets
- Veterans are more trusting of their neighbors (62.5%) than are non-vets (55.1%) and are more likely to do favors for their neighbors

Veterans have learned about sacrifice first hand. MacArthur simply called them, “the noblest development of mankind.”