

More Than 11 Decades Later, VFW Remains Veterans' Best Advocate

VFW'S strength extends far beyond advocacy

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On September 29, 1899, thirteen men – all Spanish-American War veterans – gathered at a small tailor shop in the heart of Columbus, Ohio, to discuss the issues plaguing returning veterans. The men shared personal accounts of what was then, the most popular war in America's history, but more importantly discussed what they could do for their brothers-in-arms and for the dependents of their fallen comrades.

Banding together, these men created a veterans organization that would outlast themselves, and survive as long as Americans put on uniforms to defend our country.

Their resolve to promote and defend the general welfare of all those who have borne the brunt of battle ultimately laid the groundwork for the multifaceted organization that is the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. (VFW) today.

Most easily recognized as the largest and most accomplished combat veterans service organization in America, the VFW has evolved into a powerhouse for veterans.

Since its inception more than 11 decades ago, the VFW has been committed to advocating on behalf of all veterans, service members and their families. Veterans both old and young have joined in its cause, ensuring that veterans of every era are respected for their service, receive their earned entitlements, and are recognized for the sacrifices they and their loved ones have made on behalf of our great nation.

The VFW's founders challenged the status quo and in doing so, accepted nothing less than America's commitment to appropriately care for those who willingly take up arms in defense of our country and way of life. And in the decades since, it has been the VFW that has remained persistent and unwavering in its fight to ensure that America fulfills that obligation.

Over the last 116 years, the VFW's efforts have played an instrumental role in nearly every

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piece of veterans' legislation passed since the beginning of the 20th century. It helped create the Montgomery and Post-9/11 GI Bills. It was a key player in the development of the national cemetery system and led the fight for compensation for Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange and for veterans diagnosed with Gulf War Syndrome. It was a powerful force in the VOW to Hire Heroes Act, the reinstatement of military Tuition Assistance programs and more recently, the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 which provided necessary resources, reduced appointment waiting times, and has provided veterans timely access to quality VA and non-VA health care alike.

While the VFW's legislative influence is vast and well known, the effect the VFW has had on the lives of America's heroes, and those of their families extends far beyond its advocacy efforts. Its programs and services continue to provide America's heroes and their families with the vital support they need.

From providing millions in financial assistance covering basic needs in times of crisis and more than \$1.1 million in college scholarships for veterans, to its members volunteering nearly 9 million hours of time annually to their local communities, the VFW and its Posts continue to act as pillars of support in communities across America and abroad.

Though the organization has changed much over the years, today's VFW still operates with the same mission it was founded upon more than 11 decades ago – existing only to care for those who selflessly fight and sacrifice to protect the American way of life – a mission that won't change any time soon.