

STATEMENT OF
JOHN H. GEIGER, NATIONAL COMMANDER
THE AMERICAN LEGION
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON RESOLUTIONS (PLATFORM)
1972 REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION

Miami Beach, Florida

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Republican Platform Committee:

I appear here today as National Commander of The American Legion, an organization chartered fifty-three years ago by the Congress of the United States and comprised of over two million seven hundred thousand members who have served this country in time of war, and who now are joined together for continued service to their community, state and Nation. I also speak for the American Legion Auxiliary, an organization with a membership of nearly one million equally dedicated wives, mothers, sisters and daughters of those who served their country in its time of need. Our combined membership, organized in posts and units throughout the Nation and in 19 foreign countries, represents a broad cross-section of the patriotic and concerned citizenry of the United States of America.

With me is Mr. Herald Stringer, Director of our National Legislative Commission, who has the responsibility of representing our organization before the United States Congress. We deeply appreciate this opportunity to submit to you the recommendations of The American Legion as you prepare to draft a platform for presentation to your National Convention.

NATIONAL SECURITY AND FOREIGN POLICY

The security of these United States has been a primary concern of The American Legion since it was chartered by the Congress in 1919. For over 50 years the organization has been saying that the best way for our country to live in peace is to stay prepared.

American Legionnaires have experienced at first hand the ultimate consequences of international discord, and have remained alert to the many threats—from both within and without our borders—to our society's way of life. The American Legion knows that freedom is not free! Our members know that as part of the price of preserving freedom at home, America must bear the cost of advancing freedom abroad.

While the alleged virtues of the communist ideology have been repeatedly discredited, and while the image of the "communist monolith" appears to have been permanently destroyed, communism's threat to freedom is no less evident. The danger persists because, despite the current disarray in the communist world, there is no lessening of the collective will of communist parties (whether they look for leadership to Moscow or to Peking), to subvert all free governments, with the United

States being their prime ultimate target.

The American Legion believes that unless and until the communist countries renounce their intentions to subvert free governments and enslave free peoples--and provide unequivocal evidence of such renunciation, including disavowal of the subversive organizations promoted and controlled by them in non-communist countries, and withdrawal of support for so-called "wars of national liberation"--the free nations, led by the United States, must continue to provide themselves with, and be prepared to use, all possible means of defense.

For as long as is necessary, therefore, we urge that the defense policy and the foreign policy of the United States be oriented toward the proposition of peace through strength. While the emphasis of our defense policy should be on deterrence, and that of our foreign policy on our peaceful intentions, both must at all times and in all ways be wholly and compatibly integrated; that is, one must be a consistent complement to the other in establishing and maintaining the credibility of our will and of our power to remain free.

The American Legion considers it essential to our national security that our defenses and our foreign policies be such as will retain the confidence of our allies and command the respect of our enemies. America must practice firm and consistent policies in both the military and diplomatic fields to the end (1) that our friends will remain assured of our intention and our determination to fulfill our commitments for the preservation and

promotion of freedom, and (2) that our foes will remain convinced of our capability and our readiness to back up that resolve.

Pursuant to our fundamental convictions expressed herein, The American Legion recommends the following for inclusion in your 1972 Platform:

With regard to the conflict in Southeast Asia, we recommend that the United States:

1. Continue to provide military and economic assistance to the peoples of South Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand to enable them to preserve their independence and right of self-determination against communist aggression and subversion throughout Southeast Asia;
2. provide logistical support, military advice and aerial support to the free governments of South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia so long as necessary in accordance with the tenor of the Nixon doctrine;
3. provide aerial support of our allies including attacks upon military targets and enemy sanctuaries in Indochina, wherever located, in order to protect the lives of all allied troops and to deter aggressive attacks;
4. remain receptive to peace talks with North Vietnam with a view to engaging in serious discussions of major issues; and
5. insist upon the enemies' full compliance with the provisions of the 1949 Geneva Convention on Treatment of Prisoners of War for our servicemen who are captive or missing in Southeast Asia, and refuse to sign any agreements that do not provide for the identification and repatriation of all POW/MIA.

Concerning international cooperation, we recommend that the United States:

1. continue to participate in international organizations such as the United Nations and its subsidiary agencies but that it demand far-reaching changes in fiscal, administrative and voting regulations and procedures to rescue the U.N. from bankruptcy and to reduce American costs; to revitalize the U.N. Secretariat; and to reform the voting powers to reflect the power,

fiscal contributions, and population of the members in true proportions;

2. emphasize the work of the United Nations in those areas where it has demonstrated the ability to succeed—health, welfare, agriculture, education, refugee relief, science and technology—and not those subject to the manipulation of some of the great powers, such as peacekeeping forces, colonialism and mediation in internal disputes;

3. support and strengthen regional mutual security pacts, such as NATO, CENTO and SEATO, and encourage the growth of others such as ASEAN and ASPAC. In no case should we unilaterally reduce our commitments to these allies or to others bound to us by bilateral security agreements;

4. retain its sovereign control over the Panama Canal and Panama Canal Zone for our national and hemispheric security and for the efficient operation of the canal; and

5. maintain its diplomatic relations with the Republic of China and encourage closer relations with Japan.

To deter aggression and provide a base for measures to reduce world tension, The American Legion recommends that the United States attain and retain its TRIAD of strong, modern military forces by:

1. production of the B-1 advance manned bomber;
2. deployment of the Safeguard anti-ballistic missile system;
3. modernization of the Minuteman III force and utilization of MIRVs;
4. development and deployment of TRIDENT;
5. rebuilding and modernization of the U.S. Navy through new ship construction;
6. retention of well-trained and equipped conventional forces backed by effective Reserves;
7. extension of the Military Selective Service Act beyond the June 30, 1973 expiration date in order to assure the size and vitality of the Regular and Reserve forces;

8. adoption of policies necessary to restore the prestige of American service personnel; and
9. a dynamic R & D effort to provide modern weapon systems.

The United States should also provide adequate funds to fully implement the Merchant Marine Act of 1970 and develop a broad program of civil defense through construction and education.

Blanket amnesty should not be granted to draft evaders or deserters from the armed forces. After the Vietnam conflict is ended and peace is established, and our prisoners of war and missing in action have been repatriated or accounted for, each case should be reviewed under existing procedures available to the courts and the President.

This Nation is faced with new and difficult challenges. Expensive decisions must be made concerning our national security. The hostility directed toward the military establishment and the so-called military-industrial complex is undermining the only forces which provide protection for our country. If it continues we will become a second rate power--incapable of assuring our future security and freedom.

The American Legion knows from experience that freedom never has been and never will be preserved without pain--and struggle--and individual effort. This truth must be faced by every generation--in every year--and in every day of our lives.

Throughout its history the Legion has advocated a military force big enough and strong enough to meet any contingency of war or aggression. We will continue to stand firm in our efforts to insure the security of this Nation and its people.

AMERICANISM

America will soon celebrate its 200th Anniversary as a free and independent Nation. The Bicentennial year will be a time for all Americans to review and reaffirm the basic principles on which this country was founded. In these difficult and troubled times, with established institutions under attack--our values challenged--and patriotism not in vogue, we need to renew our faith in America. We need to reflect on the responsibilities of citizens living in a free society. Unlike a great sports event where a few perform and millions watch, citizenship is not a spectator sport. Everyone concerned with his country's future had better get in the game.

The need for instilling patriotism and the values of our American heritage in our young people is more apparent today than at any time in our history. Defiance of law, disregard for the established institutions of government and for the attainment of objectives through the normal political processes, suggests an urgent need for the development of an effective means of teaching our young the values of our American system. The Federal government should provide more leadership in this area.

The American Legion believes there must be a rebirth of responsibility on the part of all our people, young and old alike--a restoration of reverence and respect for the law--a reminder to all Americans that this is a Nation and a government of laws and not of men. Reverence and respect for law and order must again be taught in the homes and in the schools--preached from the pulpits--proclaimed in the legislative halls--and enforced in the courts of our country.

But if we are to promote respect for law and order and our democratic institutions, we must do more than give it lip service. We must involve ourselves as responsible citizens and improve the dialogue between ourselves and between ourselves and our government. While the right of peaceable assembly, protest and dissent must always be preserved, the exercise of those rights carries with it a corresponding obligation to nurture and support the law under which we govern ourselves. History is replete with the wreckage of governments whose citizens lost their regard for law and justice and love for their country's heritage.

The American Legion has always strongly supported the principle that education is a necessary prerequisite to the successful functioning of a democracy. While recognizing the right of private and religious groups to maintain schools, the Legion vigorously subscribes to the necessity of a universal publicly supported system of primary, secondary and college education to insure that every American child has the opportunity to learn. The American Legion believes that popular self-government as created by the covenant set forth in the Constitution cannot continue to exist unless there is a system of free public education.

Support for law enforcement agencies at the local, state and national level is vital. We urge improved training facilities, better equipment and adequate compensation for the personnel of these agencies and that the

states be assisted in establishing and expanding their police training programs. We strongly recommend continued support of those governmental groups and agencies most responsible for our internal security, especially, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Justice, the House Committee on Internal Security, the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, and the Subversive Activities Control Board.

The American Legion recommends a revision of the Flag Code (Public Law 77-829). The language of this statute dealing with display of the Flag has led to a multiplicity of interpretations and confusion on the part of the public. The Legion further recommends that any revision of Public Law 77-829 provide penalties for those who knowingly and publicly cast contempt for or show disrespect for the Flag of the United States.

Mr. Chairman, in 1968 the Congress enacted Public Law 90-363 which, among other things, changed the dates for observance of Veterans Day from November 11th to the fourth Monday in October and Memorial Day from May 30th to the last Monday in May. The American Legion opposed enactment of this legislation.

The new dates for these patriotic holidays became effective for the first time last year and there is much resentment throughout the country to the change. Some states have refused to conform their state laws to the Federal Act. Others did conform but have subsequently enacted legislation restoring the original dates.

After a year of experience with this so-called Monday Holiday law The American Legion is more than ever convinced that the Congress should reconsider its previous action.

By this legislative distortion of history the Nation's heritage was diminished in an effort to accommodate our economic system. The patriotic meaning of November 11 and May 30 has deteriorated into week-end jamborees devoted to pleasure and profit. Emphasis is placed on weekend trips to favorite resorts, to holiday promotions and merchandise sales.

Veterans Day and Memorial Day have, or should have, a significant meaning to Americans. In past years our citizens gathered in thousands of communities across the Nation on these patriotic holidays to participate in ceremonies of remembrance and to offer prayers of thanks for those who have served our Nation. This is a part of our living heritage as Americans. Last year in many communities our people continued to hold Veterans Day services on November 11 notwithstanding the change in the law.

The American Legion believes it is important that our history and our heritage be kept alive and meaningful. If there is no regard for historical fact, for tradition and for national heritage, we become hypocritical when we endeavor to impress the importance of these virtues upon our young people.

The overriding reason for the establishment of Memorial Day on May 30 and Veterans Day on November 11 was to commemorate those living

and dead who have contributed to our Nation's greatness.

There is widespread support to restore the dates for observing Memorial Day and Veterans Day to the dates that were in effect prior to the change. Many bills have been introduced in this Congress to accomplish that purpose but no action has been taken.

The American Legion believes the Congress should respond to the desires of our veterans and other patriotic citizens. We ask the support of the Republican Party in this endeavor.

The American Legion believes it has a responsibility to do all that it can to build character in our youth through its programs of Americanism, including baseball, scouting, school medal awards and other youth activities. The Legion is working constantly to bring about a renewal of faith in and love for the principles upon which this Nation was founded. Whatever our problems, and there are many, this is still the best place in the world in which to live. We don't build barriers and fences to keep people from leaving the United States. Instead, millions from less fortunate countries are clamoring to get in. We must be doing something right, despite what the critics say.

In one of his speeches before he became President, Dwight Eisenhower said:

"Self interest and patriotism go together. You have to look out for yourself and you have to look out for your country. You will understand your own problems better and solve them more easily if you have studied America's problems and done something toward their solution."

There are some among us, however, who are all too willing to taste the fruits of democracy and enjoy the rights of citizenship, but who refuse to carry their share of responsibility. The American Legion believes that it is time for our citizens to take renewed pride in America and to actively participate in its affairs. To "stand and wait" while others serve is not enough. We cannot stand and wait while there are things that need to be done. We can no longer afford to sit on the sidelines. We must get in the ballgame.

So, as this Nation prepares for its Bicentennial year, I ask you to join with The American Legion in a rousing campaign of Americanism—to face up to the task before us—recapture the values which made us a great people—rise up to a new sense of love for our country—and reaffirm the pledge made in Gettysburg over one hundred years ago as President Lincoln faced his moment of truth. Let us say with him, "That this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that the government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth."

Thank you again for this opportunity of presenting these recommendations on behalf of The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary.