

Remarks by
Wally Tyson
National Commander-Elect
Disabled American Veterans
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National Commander Barrera, National Adjutant Wilson, Department and Chapter Commanders, honored guests, friends, and my fellow DAV members:

As I stand before so many great Americans – so many patriotic and forthright men and women – I'm humbled to be counted among you. I look forward to this opportunity to serve you and vow I will do my utmost to meet the dauntingly high standards that have been set by so many veterans who've worn the cap of national commander over the past nine decades.

As I look out at my brothers and sisters in this room and think of those watching at home and all those we represent, I stand in awe of the adversity you've overcome and the selflessness and sense of duty that bring us together.

Anyone who truly understands what the DAV is will tell you that, beyond being the best service organization for veterans in the world... Beyond being a network of chapters and departments...

Beyond having the most caring volunteers on earth... Beyond being one of the most respected voices in Washington, D.C....

At the heart of who we are – DAV is a community. We are an organization of members.

In the cities where you live, in your circles of influence, **you ARE the DAV.**

You are the backbone behind our successes from Main Street to "K" Street -- *and the reason why we saw **Pennsylvania Avenue** in downtown Atlanta this week.*

Our community now celebrates nine decades as an official, unified body. Our National Adjutant has wisely asked that we use this as a time to prepare for a **new century of service and advocacy.**

As a community, we have enjoyed astounding successes in the last couple of years. We took the lead and saw advance funding of the VA become a reality.

We've seen our government own up to its responsibilities to the veterans who've suffered **Agent Orange** exposure.

Through generations who've suffered in silence, we've pushed to recognize that not all the trauma inflicted on the battlefield is visible. **PTSD** is an issue the DAV identified. We've taken the stigma out of getting help.

We can hope in this area in particular that immediate care will change a trend that's been disastrous for generations of our members and their families...

For the first time, we've seen improved assistance and training for **caregivers**— a step that recognizes that when a veteran is disabled in service that he or she isn't the only one to bear the burden of a life forever changed.

The VA of yesteryear was slow to recognize the sacrifices of **women veterans**. Today we see our honorable female comrades taking leadership roles in our ranks and being welcomed in VA facilities where previously they felt isolation.

We're even marching nearer and nearer to breaking ground on the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial that will recognize the sacrifices and contributions of our community in a place of honor and prominence in our nation's capital.

I'm not, of course, going to stand in front of you and say that we're finished or that we've cleared every hurdle when it comes to these and the other issues where we've seen considerable progress. You know better.

The VA we inherited was not perfect. But its better than the VA our grandparents returned from Japan and Europe to find and a far cry better than the federal initiative their father's had to begin as the Disabled American Veterans of the World War.

Our commitment, as veterans who *recognize the importance of our organization and have benefited from it*, must be on preparing for a new century of unity and advocacy.

We must look for meaningful ways we can extend our reach, improve communications and use available technologies to build momentum in all aspects of our business.

If you ask anyone what makes the DAV unique – what makes us different – they will tell you that it is our commitment to service that makes us stand apart.

Our credibility comes from the National Service Officers who are processing some ***quarter-of-a-million claims annually.***

Our credibility lies in the hands of the **volunteers** who make veterans in VA hospitals feel appreciated or who make it possible for them to get to and from their appointments in the first place.

Our brand identity is formed in the minds of veterans, families and survivors when we take the time to thank them and provide some advice during a Military Appreciation Monday or civic event.

It's our Transition Service Officers helping servicemembers get off to a good start in their civilian lives and our Department and Chapter Service Officers who make certain no veteran they encounter falls through the cracks.

Our reputation is built on service and advocacy – and we could do a whole lot worse. The reason why we are successful as a veterans service organization is because, *deep down*, **the people in our community are true believers.**

We know what hope means to our brothers and sisters who find a ray of light when they felt that the world had turned its back on them. At the end of the day, there's a sentimental voice in our hearts that believes in justice.

That sense of optimism led me to serve with my fellow veterans in the DAV. The sense of community and duty I recaptured from my days in the military kept me coming back, and the mentorship I received inspired me to look for greater possibilities to serve our community.

I would ask that each of you take the time to find ways you can better serve our community. I'd ask you to be mentors to a new generation of veterans who we need to bring along quickly to fill our ranks.

I would ask that you remember the times you felt down and out, and a fellow veteran or auxiliary member in our community picked you back up again.

Look out for the people in your state and town. **Bring them into the fold.** If they're qualifying veterans, make them members... Know what to say when they offer to help. And if they need help, connect them with a national service officer.

Use this time to live up to Adjutant Wilson's call to prepare for a new century of service – and do so, moving forward, **as members of a community.**

Now is a time when our community needs *passionate advocates*. I ask you to speak your minds and to speak from your hearts. Become involved – if not at the statehouse, be someone who speaks out at the diner, on Facebook in your local newspaper. *Your voice matters*. You have the power to make a difference.

We've seen things happening at the chapter and department level that are inspiring. The Department of Minnesota's Donor Connection Program is an example of an initiative that takes advantage of our networks and pairs individuals in need with the resources they wouldn't otherwise get.

The key to success in the next century of service and advocacy is our loyalty to our organization and our ability to leverage our resources. At the chapter level, that means giving new members the opportunity to make decisions.

On the national level, it means harnessing our experience and unparalleled knowledge of the issues we face and providing solutions to the issues that impact us all. That includes our *21st Century Claims Process* proposal, our ongoing *Stand Up for Veterans* program and future initiatives – some online – wherein we'll ask you to lend your influence and voice to benefit our movement.

I hope when that call goes out, you will remember your rightful place as a member of our community; remember our core values of service, quality, integrity and leadership; and be mindful of the influence you have as the DAV where you live.

Thank you for your confidence and for answering the call – for holding your DAV accountable to the needs of its members and for giving your organization the credibility we need to make amazing things happen for our nation's disabled veterans, their families and survivors.

Thank you for welcoming me into your community and for supporting me and your fellow veterans who rely on your leadership, foresight and passionate involvement.

God bless you, God bless those who are serving in harm's way, God bless the DAV and God bless the United States of America.

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