

**Remarks by
Arthur H. Wilson
National Adjutant
Disabled American Veterans
89th National Convention
Atlanta, Georgia
Saturday, July 31, 2010**

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7/29/10

Thank you, Commander, for that kind introduction. Hello everyone. It's an honor to be before you once again. Good news... It's been a landmark year for the DAV.

Your strong grassroots support was answered with remarkable achievement this year. The credit goes to you for your support, dedication and powers of persuasion.

You continue to make our DAV the very best veterans' service organization in the world. In a few minutes I will show you the contributions that have been made to sustain this powerful organization.

In this year we have won advance funding for VA health care. We have won greater federal support for veteran caregivers, women veterans, homeless veterans, veterans with mental health needs and veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury.

With your support, we are working with the VA create a streamlined claims adjudication process that is already having an effect.

We are at the forefront of issues that strengthen the rights and benefits of our newest generation of veterans.

It's our 90th year. So we're celebrating nine decades of building better lives for disabled veterans and their families.

When the DAV was founded 90 years ago, we had a clear purpose.

Those disabled veterans faced a withering bureaucracy. Little was being done to help them and there was no Department of Veterans Affairs.

Veterans who had been gassed, shot and shelled while fighting in the mud of Europe came home to a nation that lacked the commitment to care for those who had borne the battle.

They were faced with hopelessness in dealing with the lack of a centralized system for medical care and government benefits.

As disabled veterans gathered to form our organization, their goal was to protect and defend our rights and to obtain health care and earned compensation.

Those few members knew what had to be done. Over the years they whittled away the bureaucracy and help create programs to honor disabled veterans.

It wasn't easy. It was like peeling an onion. For every layer we pulled away, there was another waiting.

Over 90 years, we peeled away many layers, surviving the Great Depression, World War II, the Forgotten War in Korea and the torment of Vietnam.

Programs for disabled veterans were created and then abandoned when peace came. The meeting of achievement and disappointment over 90 years has made the DAV the very best.

We have become the eventual authority on issues affecting disabled veterans.

The DAV was galvanized in those early days of the 1920s with our purpose and mission. While

remaining flexible to changing times, we have always remained faithful to our mission to build better lives for disabled veterans, their families and survivors.

Our mission is the strength of our foundation. We cut through the tough issues throughout our 90-year history. We met the challenges posed by new issues head-on. We have stepped up, faced adversity and used our wisdom, knowledge and our mission to ensure success.

For 90 years, we have exhibited unmatched leadership in the public policy arena advocating for our fellow disabled veterans.

That is your achievement. As our legislative team meets with members of Congress, everyone in the room knows that they are empowered by you – the active grassroots strength of the DAV.

Everything we do is steeled by our service, volunteers, transportation and other programs. Our lawmakers know that the DAV speaks on behalf of our country's veterans -- ***because you tell them so.***

No nation in the world can boast that it does more for veterans than America. We started down that road 90 years ago and it is a road not traveled by the meek and faint of heart. Along the road, our leaders change, but new ones pick up the reins and we follow the path ahead of us.

Today, we are working hard to tell the DAV story to young veterans of the current wars and we're making excellent progress. Someday soon, they too will be leaders in the DAV.

And many of our newest disabled veterans are not only joining the DAV, but have become National Service Officers.

And, yes, our National Service Officer corps is getting younger. They are highly trained and extremely motivated. ***Simply stated they are the best practicing advocates, bar none.***

So, I ask that all NSOs, both active and retired, please stand for an expression of gratitude for a job well done.

(Pause)

Thank You!

Our Transition Service Officers do their jobs serving our newest generation of veterans when they leave the military. Our TSOs assist servicemembers making the transition back to civilian life by providing benefits counseling and filing initial claims for VA benefits at more than 100 military installations across our nation.

Would all of TSOs please stand and accept the thanks of the National Convention for extraordinary service...

(Pause)

Thank you for what you do.

Speaking of our outstanding service programs, I want to especially thank all of our Chapter and Department Service Officers for everything they do, day in and day out. Please, all Department and Chapter Service Officers rise and be recognized.

(Pause)

Thank you for being there for our veterans.

This is our record of service – and our reputation continues to grow as we reach out to young veterans across our nation. They know who's best.

And while I'm thanking folks, I want to extend my congratulations and thanks to all of our remarkable membership recruiters, including our NSOs and TSOs, for their commitment to building this great organization.

I'd like to do more than **tell** you about our programs of service this year. I want to **show** you. The amount of service we provide can't be fully appreciated until you see it yourself.

So, let's take a moment now to look back at the accomplishments of the DAV during the past year. Join with me as we review a year that you all will be proud of...

(ROLL TAPE)

This was quite a year. As we celebrate the 90th year of the DAV, please remember it is only one year of achievement. Multiply that by 90 and you see the overwhelming body of work the DAV has delivered on behalf of disabled veterans and their families.

But what really distinguishes DAV is our commitment to direct service and advocacy for those who have given so much for our nation.

(PAUSE)

Now I'd like to take a moment to look into the future a bit. I'm pleased to tell you that construction on the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial has begun.

In mid-July, Phase One of the project began which involved moving some of the underground

communications cables around the site. Road work has also begun.

Phase Two – involving the infrastructure street work and the relocation of utilities on the main site -- will start later in the year.

At the same time, applications are being reviewed by the U.S. Park Service for permits submitted in July.

We expect the permits to be issued before the end of the year and formal construction will start in

the spring or summer – assuming the necessary memorial funds are raised.

Right now, there's a need to raise \$3.2 million dollars to complete the construction budget and we're optimistic that money will be raised. The fund raising campaign is on track.

I'm sure you've seen the commemorative Memorial coins for sale here at the convention. We really need to sell these coins out. So far, 215-thousand have been sold, but 135-thousand remain on hand.

Keep in mind that the Federal Government only permits two coins per year to be minted. We've been working on this coin for about 7 years. Most likely there will not be another coin honoring disabled veterans any time in the near future.

So please stop by the booth outside the convention hall to pick up your coin, or you can purchase them in the DAV Convention store as sales come to an end in December.

While you're at it, please take a long look at the model of the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial that's on display.

You will be reviewing the final design and memorial staff is on hand to answer your questions.

On another note, we expect to surpass the National Organization's \$3 million dollar match at this convention. Based on what Chapters and Departments bring to the Convention for the Memorial, we expect to exceed our goal by at least 500 thousand dollars.

As individual members, Chapters and Departments, you have played a crucial role.

This is your Memorial, and make no mistake about it, you, and your fellow disabled veterans are building this memorial.

Sure, we've been fortunate enough to have many heavy hitters financially support this long overdue project, but the real support has come from each and every one of you.

I salute you and your comrades' – thank you for this legacy which will exist through eternity.

The Foundation estimates that donations and in-kind services provided by DAV since 1998 are

valued at more than \$10 million. That makes the DAV the largest single donor to the Memorial.

Again, thank you for being there, once again, when it counts.

Talking about when things count. It is an unfortunate reality that there is still going to be a need for the DAV and other organization well into the future.

With our nation at war, many thousands of wounded and disabled veterans have already had their lives changed forever and the DAV is the one

place they can turn to for the service and advocacy they and their families need.

That's why we will continue investing in building and strengthening our service programs. New technology will help us serve them better. We continue to deploy innovative programs to reach out to future generations of disabled veterans. And improved training and updating the skills of our NSOs, TSOs, DSOs and CSOs are essential to our mission.

And we will continue exploring and implementing ways that will make the DAV the kind of organization

that new generations of disabled veterans will **want** to join and become active in it. We want them to know that the DAV is committed to meeting their service and advocacy needs and that we will always have a place for them in our ranks.

While I'm on the subject of advocacy and commitment, I want to thank the outstanding leadership of National Commander Roberto "Bobby" Barrera. He has been an inspiration to us all.

Bobby has used his skill and articulate intellect to advance our issues. Plus his compassion for disabled veterans has been truly overwhelming.

Having seen the Commander in action, I can tell you that there are few people who can do such a tremendous job of carrying our message of service and advocacy to every kind of audience. From representing the DAV in the halls of Congress, in the Oval Office, and in his compassionate visits to the injured and wounded at military hospitals, patients at VA medical centers and the general public, nobody does it better than Bobby Barrera.

Thank you, Commander, for all that you've done and being with us during this time in our history. Our special thanks to your lovely bride, Mary, who has shared you with us for the past 5 years.

As you know National Headquarters Executive Director Rick Patterson retired recently after 38 years with the DAV. He leaves behind a superb record that is the gold standard for our organization.

Rick's enthusiasm and dedication has set an example for everyone to emulate and he is someone we have enjoyed throughout his well defined and successful career.

His exceptional commitment and record as a combat-disabled veteran has made his contribution

more than just words – he took action and served both the DAV and America as a true patriot.

Thank you, Rick, for all you have accomplished in your long career at the DAV and what you have done for our country.

Executive Director Dave Gorman in Washington and his staff provide unparalleled leadership in the service and legislative arena to meet the needs of those we serve.

Dave – a combat-disabled veteran of Vietnam – has served as Executive Director in Washington

since 1995. He has spearheaded every DAV legislative initiative since and his responsibilities also include oversight of our National Service Program.

Dave is the organization's principal spokesperson before Congress, the White House and the VA. Charged with this awesome responsibility, he is recognized as the premier veterans service advocate by everyone in Washington. There's none better.

These gentlemen are the finest professionals that one could hope for and have carried out their duties in the finest traditions of the DAV.

Supported by their highly professional staffs, our mission and goals are fulfilled every day.

And most vital to our mission are Garry Augustine and the National Service Department staff; and Joe Violante and his team in our National Legislative Department.

I also wish to thank:

Assistant Executive Director Marc Burgess

Susan Loth from the Fund Raising Department
and her staff;

Tony Baskerville and everyone in the
Membership Department;

Gary Weaver and his crew in the
Communications Department;

Bill Saunders and the Information Technology
team;

Mike Walsh and the National Voluntary Services
staff;

Barry Jesinoski, Randy Reese and everyone of
our Human Resources staff;

Nancy O'Brien who administers our charitable
programs;

Inspector General Ed Hartman;

General Counsel Chris Clay; and

Comptroller Anita Blum and her team who handle all of our financial matters.

My sincere thanks to all of our employees...some 650 in all...who do such a fine job every in fulfilling our mission.

I also want to offer my sincere thanks to our support staffs at our headquarters offices and our offices all around the country.

My personal thanks and gratitude go to Executive Assistant Carol Ayers and Executive Secretary Sally Miller.

Special appreciation goes to Auxiliary National Commander Kay Egan, Auxiliary National Adjutant Judy Hezlep for their service on behalf of America's disabled veterans and their families.

And to all of you, our members who make up the greatest veterans service organization in the world. Thank you for your commitment and dedication to our mission of serving this nation's disabled veterans.

For 90 years, the DAV has grown from a small group of disabled World War I veterans to the

nation's most powerful force of advocacy for disabled veterans and their families and survivors. It is a testament to our legacy and commitment to our core principles of service, quality, integrity and leadership.

That legacy endures, thanks to you, our members, and your dedication to our mission. And because of your strength of purpose, we remain committed to meeting the opportunities and challenges now and into the future.

Thank you. God bless our fighting men and women across the world and God bless America.

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