

**Remarks by
Arthur H. Wilson
National Adjutant
Disabled American Veterans
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Thank you, Commander. Good afternoon everyone. It's a pleasure to be with you once again. It's been a remarkable year for the DAV – thanks to you -- our dedicated and loyal membership.

I commend you for everything you have done to make sure we remain the best veterans' service organization in the world. And I know it has not been easy. These certainly are challenging times.

Our nation's economy hasn't been hit this hard in decades. Far too many of our brave men and women have been wounded, killed and disabled in Iraq and Afghanistan. More and more disabled veterans and their loved ones are in serious need as our government struggles to meet all of the demands placed on it – both at home and abroad.

But despite the fact that we have been faced with declining donations and ever-increasing costs, your DAV has never missed a beat. Not one of our programs of service to disabled veterans has been cut. Yes, we have tightened our belts and initiated savings, but our service has continued unabated.

Our strategic planning and oversight has positioned us to take the hits and still deliver the goods. We continue to fulfill our mission of building better lives for disabled veterans and their families.

We also continue our unmatched leadership in the public policy arena advocating for our fellow disabled veterans.

June 23rd was a great day for veterans and a proud day for DAV, so I want to take a moment to discuss this because you have all been a part of this success.

That was the day the House of Representatives voted 409 to 1 to approve the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act.

On August 7th, similar legislation passed the Senate by unanimous consent, setting the stage for the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees to negotiate a final version of the legislation, which can then be approved by the full House and Senate and signed by the President.

This historic legislation will ensure sufficient, timely and predictable funding for the VA health care system. It will strengthen and sustain the delivery of medical services to millions of veterans, particularly disabled veterans.

I am proud to say that this legislation was developed, proposed and promoted by DAV as part of our Stand Up For Veterans initiative, and we have devoted significant time and resources to aid in its approval.

The House also approved the Women Veterans Health Care Improvement Act, another bill that comes directly out of DAV's Stand Up For Veterans initiative.

Both of these bills have strong bipartisan support and we expect to see President Obama signing them into law later this year.

I think it is important to reflect on how we have achieved these successes and to thank all of you who have played such an important role.

When your legislative team meets with members of the House and Senate, they walk through the door armed with our stellar reputation, something that you have all helped to empower and enrich.

Everything we do is strengthened by the many ways in which our service, volunteer, transportation and other programs have assisted disabled veterans.

So you should all feel proud of the work you have done to support and sustain DAV.

If you are one of the thousands of our members who contacted members of Congress urging them to support DAV's legislative agenda, you know that you have played a vital role in helping us develop a broad and bipartisan coalition of supporters on Capitol Hill.

I am confident that there are more good days and more victories to come. For now let me express my thanks for the work you do and in the commitment you have shown to improve the lives of disabled veterans and their families.

We have witnessed remarkable changes in the DAV this year. We have seen a new generation of disabled veterans joining our ranks and moving into leadership positions at all levels.

And speaking of membership, I would like to thank all of our remarkable membership recruiters, including our NSOs and TSOs, for their excellent dedication which continues the growth of the DAV and helps to ensure that we reach our stated goals.

Many new members are entering our National Service Officer corps and several have joined our Headquarters staffs. They are highly trained and extremely motivated. They bring a new energy and renewed strength to the DAV that will last well into the 21st century.

While our organization continues to attract new members, we have sadly witnessed a steep decline in the number of World War II members.

But, we HAVE seen an increase in Vietnam veterans and those who served in more recent wars. Many of them served in the modern era and during Desert Storm and are bringing new vitality to our organization.

Our primary mission of service has been excellent. We represented nearly one quarter of a million veterans and their families in their claims for benefits last year – obtaining for them over \$3 billion dollars in new and retroactive benefits.

We provide great services at the Board of Veterans Appeals and the U.S. Appeals Court for Veterans Claims. We have represented more than 27% of all cases decided by the Board of Veterans Appeals in 2008.

We implemented a long-anticipated plan to utilize the services of carefully selected law firms to provide free representation to some DAV clients at the veterans' court. Nearly 200 veterans received that free representation before the court in 2008.

With the assistance of the pro bono work, we expect the number of veterans receiving representation before the court will increase substantially in future years.

Our 260 NSOs and 41 TSOs are highly trained professionals and skilled experts in developing and prosecuting veteran's claims through in-depth reviews of medical histories.

These 300 men and women are the best because they do what they are trained to do.

Our record is based on service – and our reputation of service continues to grow as we reach out to communities across our nation.

As evidence, this year we are replacing our Mobile Service Offices with ten new vehicles.

And I especially want to recognize all of our dedicated volunteers who last year donated 2.3 million hours of their own time to help their fellow sick and disabled veterans. That is an amazing record of service, and I thank you all for what you do every day.

So, let's take a moment now to look back at the innovation and energy of the DAV during the past year. Join with me as we review the challenges and achievements of the DAV...

That was just a glimpse at some of the things that set us apart from other service organizations.

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

And while I'm on the subject of advocacy and commitment, the leadership of National Commander Ray Dempsey has been inspiring. He has moved our organization forward with his skill and intellect. His compassion for disabled veterans has been a standard of his service.

Thank you, Commander, for all that you've done and being with us during this time in our history.

Executive Directors, Rick Patterson in Cold Spring, Ky., and Dave Gorman in Washington, D.C., have provided unparalleled leadership to meet the needs of those we serve.

They are two of the finest professionals that one could find anywhere and I would match them up against any executive in either the corporate or not-for-profit world.

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

And I especially wish to thank:

Randy Reese and the National Service Department staff;
Joe Violante and his team in our National Legislative Department;
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;
Greg Nichols and the Information Technology team;
Mike Walsh and the National Voluntary Services staff;
Marc Burgess and the Human Resources staff;
Nancy O'Brien who administers our charitable programs;
Deputy 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 you.

I want to especially thank our dedicated National Service Officers who carry out our mission of service.

They along with our Department and Chapter Service Officers, and Transition Service Officers make sure our disabled veterans receive the care and support that they have earned on the battlefield.

Please, will all our NSO and TSOs stand and be recognized. Thank you all for what you do every day.

Now will our DSOs and CSOs please stand to be recognized as well. Thank you all.

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

Of course, my personal thanks and gratitude to two people who provide unbeatable management -- Executive Assistant Carol Price and Executive Secretary Sally Miller.

And my special thanks to all of our employees...some 650 in all...who do such a fine job every day supporting those who have served and sacrificed to protect our freedoms.

I also want to thank the Auxiliary for all its support. From our volunteer programs to our legislative grassroots efforts and in communities across the country, the Auxiliary is always there for our disabled veterans and their families.

Auxiliary National Commander Sandy Dobmeier, we thank you for your leadership and your dedication during this year of service and transition.

I would also want to recognize DAV Auxiliary National Adjutant Judy Hezlep for her service on behalf of America's disabled veterans and their families.

Moreover, I especially want to express my deep gratitude to all of you, our members who are our greatest asset. Thank you again for your continued commitment and dedication to serving this nation's disabled veterans.

We must also remember the loyal and dedicated Americans who support us and who encourage us to continue our mission of service.

Throughout this difficult year the DAV has set new standards of excellence and quality in service.

We are clearly the best, because we continue to give our best to all those we serve. We are pledged to a mission of service.

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

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