

**Suggested Remarks for
DAV National Officers & Staff
Representing the National Organization
at Department Conventions and Conferences
★ ★ ★ ★
2010**

Acknowledgment of introduction, distinguished guests, DAV and Auxiliary officers and members, as well as others in the audience.

Thank you, [**name**], for that warm introduction, and good [**morning, afternoon, evening**] everyone.

Commander Bobby Barrera and National Adjutant Art Wilson send you their best wishes for a successful and enjoyable gathering here in [**city**].

I'm grateful to be with you at your Department Conference...to be among friends and to witness your commitment to our mission of service and hope.

In the 90 years the DAV has been blessed with the strong support of our members, we have grown to become the premiere veteran's service organization.

And all of our achievements stem from the dedication and hard work of you – our fellow veterans and members. Thank you for giving so generously of your time and effort. It really pays off for everyone we serve.

We at the National Organization do our utmost to reflect your dedication and leadership. We also strive to maintain the legacy of service you've staunchly supported since joining our organization.

Among these are our legislative goals. Our membership-driven goals are designed to ensure that the obligations owed to those who have suffered disability while serving their nation are fulfilled. Veterans have needs created by their disability. Our responsibility should never be taken for granted.

It is exciting that in this New Year I can report to you about our hard-fought victory that was nearly 20 years in the making.

That is the DAV initiative to reform the budget and appropriations process for the VA's medical care programs. This will ensure that veterans receive the health care they have earned in a timely manner.

Last fall, the Senate unanimously approved the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act. The action came on the heels of a 419-1 vote in the House, passing the legislation.

President Obama signed the landmark legislation into law on October 22 at a White House ceremony attended by National Commander Bobby Barrera and others. It is a tremendous victory – and you did it.

The Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act authorizes Congress to approve veterans medical care funding one year in advance to better meet the anticipated demand for veterans health care services.

In addition, it requires the Government Accountability Office to review the budget development process to ensure that sufficient funds are included.

This initiative ended successfully thanks to so many of you, who stepped up and called on Congress to put an end to chronic lapses in budgets that occurred almost every year for decades.

We stood up for veterans together, and veterans and their families are going to benefit.

But as always, there is much more work to do on behalf of our nation's disabled veterans and their families.

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Our next big challenge is reforming the claims process to make the system more efficient. We want the VA to get it right the first time, every time. It will take great effort and determination. But I know the DAV is up to the job...HOW ABOUT YOU?

Well, it sounds like you can – you should know that what you do is the key to achieving our legislative priorities. Each of you is important. Each of you can be the one to tip the scale from indecision by lawmakers to a vote cast in support of our issue.

You've heard of an Army of One? We are a Veterans Force of One – multiplied 1.2 million times. Your participation and your vocal support to your elected representatives will make a difference. You saw that last year with Advance Appropriations.

Our job is to educate lawmakers about the issues vital to disabled veterans and their families.

The process is now underway to reform the Veterans Benefits Approval System.

We are seeking a system for disabled veterans and their survivors that uses a simple, uniform and modern I-T-based process that gives the VA the tools to make accurate decisions within acceptable time frames.

It would also allow active duty servicemembers to apply for benefits before their separation. The system would enable accurate decisions by the time of their discharge.

Our solution calls for developing a VA work culture that emphasizes quality at every step in the claims process. We want to see employee rewards merited on quality, and not just quantity of cases. We want to see sufficient training of VA's management and workforce to achieve these results.

Lastly, we need to urge the creation of a universal – AND SIMPLE – application process that provides veterans with timely updates on the progress of their claims. Veterans should be given the right to access their records and to know the status of their claims.

At the start of this year, there were 502-thousand claims for disability compensation and pensions awaiting rating decisions. Nearly 40 percent exceeded the VA's 125-day strategic goal.

Further, claims folders for almost 300-thousand veterans were misplaced and claims for 141-thousand veterans were lost.

The business of the VA – adjudicating claims – needs business-like methods to handle and decide claims.

As DAV leaders, you have an important role to play in our efforts to reform the Veterans Benefits Approval System. We must insist that our government continues to honor America's commitment to veterans and make veterans a national priority.

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Today, on the front lines of our Service Programs, are more than 240 professionally trained National Service Officers and 34 Transition Service Officers who are relentlessly living up to the standards you've established and raised.

It is they who directly assist our disabled veterans with their claims – and it is they who are the face of the DAV to all those who seek our help.

Our Department and Chapter Service Officers are stepping up to ensure that our fellow veterans who need service get the finest representation possible. And I believe you'll agree with me when I say they've earned it.

Many of our Department and Chapter Service officers have participated in our enhanced training and certification program. To them, I must extend our thanks for serving all of the disabled veterans in your community.

Even while we extend our excellent service to veterans, we continue working to improve the quality we provide our veterans.

Our service officer training program is constantly being updated. The aim is to sharpen our skills and share that knowledge so we can do even better than before.

A DAV Mobile Service Office on tour provides benefits counseling to those veterans who suffer from service-connected injuries but may never have filed a claim for benefits or have found it too difficult working with the VA.

We have an outstanding group. To show you, I'd like all our National Service Officers, Transition Service Officers, and Department and Chapter Service Officers to please stand to be recognized...

(Applause)

Thank you sincerely for your continued hard work and dedication at the "tip of the spear" for DAV service...You are the best...

In addition to those professional services, the DAV and the Auxiliary together have nearly 15,000 volunteers in VA hospitals and clinics. In Fiscal Year 2009, our volunteers donated 2.2 million hours of free service to the patients and VA.

Since we began our free transportation program in 1987, the DAV has purchased and donated to the VA nearly 23 hundred vans, at a cost of 47 million dollars.

So far our vans have made 12.6 million round trips carrying veterans more than 471 million miles to and from their medical appointments. This program serves disabled veterans in every state and every congressional district in the country.

There is so much more than just giving you numbers. Our volunteers bring joy and support to our veterans and their families. They can bring comfort into a night of fear and pain. They can brighten moments with a caring word. And they can be there when it is important for someone to be there.

That is a high calling – one that the DAV does better than anyone else. And while numbers, hours and miles are important, so are nurturing, hugs and smiles.

I see quite a few of our volunteers, Hospital Service Coordinators and volunteer drivers here, why don't you stand up for a much-deserved round of applause from all of us...

(Applause)

You are truly an inspiration to your community and our nation.
You are great and patriotic citizens and a credit to the DAV.

Through your participation as volunteers, you have served
fellow disabled veterans in a variety of helpful and valued ways.

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Before I finish, I'd be remiss if I didn't take a moment to
recognize our professional staff in Cold Spring and Washington.
They have an enormous responsibility.

Art Wilson, Rick Patterson and Dave Gorman continue to
make all of us proud by what they do every day on behalf of
veterans at our National Headquarters in Cincinnati and our
Service and Legislative Headquarters in Washington.

We deeply appreciate all that they and their staffs do to fulfill
our mission of service and hope.

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You know, after 90 years, we are the heirs of a great and hard-fought legacy. We are the benefactors of the sacrifices of many who came before us.

For nine decades, the DAV has championed our causes with the Administration and before Congress and led the way in obtaining adequate health care and benefits for all of our disabled veterans.

But we again have a tough fight ahead of us. Thankfully, we are closer to reaching our goals – thanks to you and what you have done.

This is not the time to relax our vigilance however. This is the time to push forward with competent hard work. And I know that you will. I have seen the DAV grow more powerful each year. And the reason is right here in this room.

Each of you has put in the time, made the effort, extended yourself forward to advance our interests. Now in this 90th year, we need to do it again. No slack. No breaks. Just forward momentum.

That's what I have seen. And that is what makes me feel so good about the DAV. You all deserve the greatest thanks and praise for every historic step the DAV has taken. It was all of you stepping forward to support our fellow veterans that became the groundswell that propelled us to success.

And speaking of historic: Our 15-year campaign to build the national memorial honoring our nation's disabled veterans is entering its final stages, and your generous, steadfast support is about to be rewarded.

While there are a few more hurdles to overcome, we are poised to break ground for the construction of the **American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial** in Washington, D.C., late this year or early in 2011.

For the first time in our nation's history, the Memorial will honor those who have overcome their broken bodies with an unyielding spirit of perseverance and service. It will stand as a solemn declaration that America is forever grateful to her disabled veterans.

It will also be a daily reminder to those who send us in to battle, that the cost of war doesn't end when the fighting stops. Millions of our citizens will pass this awe-inspiring memorial and reflect on the sacrifices of disabled veterans.

And let us hope that this 90th year, and the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial, will mark the beginning of a new spirit of support for those who know the sting of battle, the wounds and tragedies of war and the sacrifices of our citizen soldiers.

I'm looking forward to it. And I know all of you are as anxious as I am to see it completed. By the way, if you haven't purchased the commemorative silver dollar coin issued by the United States Mint to honor disabled veterans, please visit www.usmint.gov to read about this official, exclusive coin and order yours today.

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As we go about our business here in [**city**], think about the momentum we can build and the hope and comfort we can provide.

Let's consider the devastating injuries that our young men and women are surviving in Afghanistan and Iraq. Let us pray that estimates of 500 casualties a month in Afghanistan are never realized.

We owe all of our fellow disabled veterans the very best the DAV has to offer.

Thank you, sincerely, for all that you do. May God bless America, and especially those men and women who have been placed in harm's way and their families. And, may God bless the DAV. Thank you and keep up the good work.

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