

The Call to Service

VETERANS DAY

11 November 2009



(Acknowledgment of introduction, distinguished guests, officers and members of the DAV and Auxiliary, and others who are present.)

On behalf of National Commander Bobby Barrera, I'd like to tell you what an honor it is to be here representing Disabled American Veterans today.

Every generation of Americans has heard the call to service.

And every time the call has sounded, our nation's men and women have stepped forward, raised their right hand and sworn to defend our nation with their lives.

That is the very reason we celebrate Veterans Day. On this day, we honor the men and women whose service and sacrifices have made the liberty we enjoy a reality.

In November 1919, President Wilson proclaimed November 11, as the first commemoration of Armistice Day to honor those who served in World War I. In 1938, it became an official holiday.

It wasn't until 1954, after World War II and the Korean War that Congress, at the urging of veterans service organizations, changed the day to Veterans Day.

Disabled American Veterans has been around for nearly as long as the holiday. We were founded in 1920 and have been dedicated to building better lives for disabled veterans and their families for nearly nine decades.

As you may know, the DAV provides free services to veterans in the form of benefits counseling and free transportation to and from VA medical centers for sick and disabled veterans.

We also provide advocacy for veterans in Washington. I'll get into that a little bit more in a minute.

But when it comes to our community of veterans, the individuals we're seeing in our offices and at the VA nationwide are starting to look younger than ever before.

For most of us, the word "veteran" conjures images of a father, an uncle, a grandfather or distant relative who fought in some war long ago and far away.

Many think of old men in funny hats who are the first to stand up and salute during the national anthem.

If you're here today, you are one of the more patriotic citizens who honor veterans for their service and what their comrades fell to defend.

On Veterans Day, I would humbly ask that you broaden your definition.

Veterans are an important part of any community – but they are also a part of their own community.

When we hear the word “veterans,” most of us are thinking of the 16 million Americans who served during World War II, the 5.7 million who heard the call during the Korean War, and the 8.7 million who served during Vietnam.

But the need for a strong national defense did not disappear after the last American servicemember left Vietnam.

The tyranny that our “Greatest Generation” battled to overcome in World War II and the tremendous sacrifices made by the men and women who battled on the Korean peninsula would mean little if others had not followed in their footsteps.

America would not be the land of the free if it weren’t also the home of the brave.

That is why our community of veterans is so respected and venerated by the public.

Today, I’d ask you, as you honor veterans, to remember the obligation and debt of gratitude we owe to the men and women who were, and are, willing to give their lives to defend their families and the way of life we enjoy today.

Every generation has invested in this cause.

When we picture the iconic image of the sailor kissing the woman under the ticker tape at Times Square on V-E Day, we must also remember the sailors who endured the attacks on the USS Cole and the Marines who survived the barracks bombing in Beirut.

There was a time we watched “smart bombs” strike targets in Kuwait with stunning accuracy.

It would be easy to forget the pilots who put themselves in harm’s way and the soldiers on the ground who marched through burning oil fields to face and turn back a determined enemy in the first Gulf War.

Before, during and since Vietnam, the legacy of bravery and selflessness that defined our fighting forces has consistently grown. The service of those who fought in lesser-remembered conflicts and the current wars has been exemplary.

Late last month, the Disabled American Veterans – with the support of several organizations and the veterans community at large – achieved a landmark success with the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act.

When this bill was signed into law, it arguably became one of the most important legislative victories for veterans since World War II.

It provides sufficient, timely and predictable funding for veterans health care.

Congress is now authorized to approve funding one year in advance for VA medical services, support and facilities.

No longer will VA hospital and clinic directors have to delay hiring new doctors or nurses or the purchase of new medical equipment because Congress fails to approve a budget on time.

The VA will be able to plan ahead to give veterans the care they deserve when and where they need it.

It's a tremendous step in the right direction for future generations of veterans who will rely on the VA for care.

Next year, as we speak, our community will have broken ground on the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial.

For the first time in history, disabled veterans will have their own place of honor in Washington, D.C.

It will be an expression of the nation's gratitude for their selfless duty on our behalf.

We have proven overwhelmingly that the American public truly cares about its veterans.

Our charge, as we celebrate this occasion, is to consider these victories a step in the right direction and to harness the patriotism in our hearts today and ensure today's promise for the future is even brighter for the men and women who've given so much to make our way of life possible.

From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for remembering our veterans whose sacrifices and service have ensured our way of life.

May God bless each and every one of you. May God bless and protect our men and women in harm's way, and may God bless our veterans who've kept our country free!

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