

93rd DAV National Convention a Hit



National Commander
Ron Hope

Las Vegas was shining even brighter Aug. 9–12 during the 93rd DAV National Convention. Vietnam veteran Ron F. Hope, of North Carolina, was elected to serve as National Commander during the event, which saw the newly appointed Secretary of Veterans Affairs give his first address to a veterans' service organization.

Hope, a combat-injured Army veteran, challenged his fellow veterans to continue the unmatched commitment to DAV's core principle of veterans helping veterans.

"As our weary nation winds down from combat operations after nearly 13 years of war, those veterans will be making that very challenging evolution that we've all experienced ourselves," said Hope. "As you all know, the transition out of uniform and back to civilian life is difficult. But that's where DAV is at its best."

Hope encouraged DAV members to join his efforts as he represents the organization to audiences across the country, challenging them to keep the promises made to America's veterans, regardless of injury or era, to ensure they receive the benefits they have earned and deserve. He emphasized the

need to continue fighting for women veterans and addressing their unique needs. "My intent is to continue fighting for those who may feel they have nowhere to turn, nowhere else to go to receive help after they sacrificed when duty called." Hope emphasized service at every level, touting the work of NSOs, TSOs, and Chapter and Department Service Officers in the field, stating that they are "the foundation of who we are and why we exist."

Hope previously served for more than 30 years as a DAV NSO, a decade of which was spent as National Area Supervisor overseeing service offices in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee. His career was dedicated to ensuring veterans received the benefits they earned, and his devotion to DAV and all of America's injured and ill veterans and service members is what drew him to seek national office.

Other National Officers elected by convention delegates are Sr. Vice Commander Moses A. McIntosh Jr., 1st Jr. Vice Commander David W. Riley, 2nd Jr. Vice Commander Delphine Metcalf-Foster, 3rd Jr. Vice Commander Dennis L. Krulder, 4th Jr. Vice Commander Brigitte Marker and National Chaplain Michael Patrick Dover. Michael E. Dobmeier was re-elected to serve as National Judge Advocate.

The DAV Auxiliary elected LeeAnn B. Karg, of Minnesota, as National Commander. Her theme for the upcoming year is "Together as One," illustrating the importance of a strong bond between DAV and the Auxiliary.



Then-National
Commander Joseph

Johnston addresses the Convention.

During his report to the convention, outgoing National Commander Joseph Johnston thanked the members for allowing him to serve during an exciting year. Johnston outlined some favorite memories from his term, including the Operation: Keep the Promise rally on Capitol Hill during the Mid-Winter Conference, where hundreds of veterans and supporters called on Congress to enact advance funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs. He encouraged everyone in attendance to continue fighting to have their voices heard in Washington and to pressure Congress to pass the Putting Veterans Funding First Act for advanced appropriations for all VA services, programs and infrastructure.

Johnston also noted the creation of the National Employment Department and praised DAV for recognizing that for veterans who are able, obtaining meaningful employment is essential for the transition from service member to civilian.

He recognized former VA Secretary Eric Shinseki's hard work on reducing the backlog and tackling veteran homelessness. Looking forward, he had the privilege of introducing the eighth Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Robert McDonald, a fellow Cincinnati native and Airborne Ranger.

McDonald, an accomplished businessman who served as the CEO of Fortune 50 company Procter & Gamble, took office July 30. He acknowledged that the audience before him had been experiencing difficult and turbulent times at the VA and that he and his staff were going to resolve that. McDonald stressed that misconduct, records falsification and apparent systemic problems deep within the VA health care system were serious failures, and he and his staff have outlined aggressive, detailed strategies to address the barriers keeping veterans from accessing the quality health care they were promised.



VA Secretary
Robert McDonald

"To be sure, it is a story of failed leadership. But it is also a story about some dedicated people who have had the moral courage to stand up and help us serve veterans better. So, my thanks to them," said McDonald. "Listen— coming face-to-face with the reality some veterans have endured isn't a disaster. It's opportunity."

The Secretary outlined a clear, thoughtful agenda that reflected many of the steps that DAV has advocated: realistic funding levels; greater commitment to transparency; focusing incentives on patient outcomes and satisfaction; getting more VA staff into the field more often to inspect health care facilities; improving technology and systems; and commissioning an independent audit of VA scheduling practices.

"So that's what we're going to do," said McDonald. "With the continued support of President Obama, Congress, great employees at VA—and especially with the always strong support of Disabled American Veterans and other veterans services organizations—we're going to do what we could never have done otherwise."

"We look forward to working closely with Secretary McDonald to strengthen the VA, including working alongside him and his team to, as he said, 'improve... forecasting for resources,'" said Johnston. "The Secretary's commitment to accurately assess the resources needed to expand

VA clinics and hospitals, and hire more doctors and nurses, is an important step toward making sure the VA provides America's veterans timely, high-quality health care." McDonald thanked DAV's leadership for the opportunity to speak, but he did quip that he wished he would have known he was speaking directly after one tough act to follow: Regis Philbin.

Philbin, a Navy veteran, was honored for his commitment to veterans and support of DAV. Before he received his award, Philbin had the audience roaring with laughter. From his one-liners to the duet, "Pennies from Heaven," with Commander Johnston, Philbin illustrated why his impressive television career has now spanned a half-century. Despite his successes, he has stayed humble and true to his roots.

"Regis has never forgotten where he came from and has selflessly supported our cause and others, raising awareness for those whose service and sacrifice has ensured our freedom," said National Adjutant Marc Burgess.

In his address, Burgess reviewed the year's activities, outlining DAV's goals and activities from 2013 to 2014. "The last year has been one of growth and challenge. We have been entrusted with the incredible legacy of DAV. And no matter the obstacles we face, our purpose and mission do not change, nor does our commitment waiver," said Burgess. "It is that commitment that has cemented our place among veteran advocates, and [it is] our body of work that has earned a reputation as a strong and influential advocate for veterans' rights.

"Our reputation has been forged through the commitment of our members, our camaraderie and dedication to service," continued Burgess. "It demands that we strive even harder in helping those who served to overcome great obstacles as they reclaim their lives after service."

Burgess concluded his remarks with a video highlighting the vast list of accomplishments since the last convention, including DAV's efforts to combat homelessness, the inaugural DAV 5k run to honor veterans and another inspiring National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic.

Outgoing Auxiliary National Commander Susan Miller reflected on a successful tenure, stating that meeting members across the nation and seeing what they do for veterans and their families daily was a humbling privilege. She commended Auxiliary members for their recruitment, but challenged them to engage the families of the newest generation of veterans.

"Many of them are not aware of the vast network of support the DAV and Auxiliary have available to them and their families," said Miller. "We must grow in order to remain a viable, productive organization, and we need to take care of all who need our support. And I think, with your help, and based on what I experienced this year, we'll certainly accomplish that."

Despite a jam-packed agenda, there was still plenty of time to enjoy the sights and sounds of the Las Vegas Strip. Fun Night, featuring swing-revival musical guests Big Bad Voodoo Daddy, and the National Commanders' Reception, with a special performance by "America's Got Talent" winner, comedian/ventriloquist Terry Fator, proved to be a big hit for adults and children alike.

The Annual Convention closed in style with the introduction of DAV and Auxiliary National Officers, followed by dinner and entertainment from The Edge that kept members' toes tapping with their mix of everything from old-school favorites to the pop hits of today.

"National Convention gives us the opportunity to elect our leadership and choose the strategic direction for our organization for the coming year and beyond," said Burgess.

“It’s a chance to network with other members and have fun, but most importantly it’s a chance to improve DAV and our individual abilities to serve veterans. I’m grateful for everyone who participated and hope all our members go online to experience the great seminars and information made available through this important gathering.”

The 94th National Convention will convene in Denver Aug. 8–11, 2015, so mark your calendars now!