

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

★ ★ ★ ★

2012

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!

I'm happy to bring you a kind message from National Commander Don Samuels and National Adjutant Art Wilson. They extend their best wishes for a successful and enjoyable meeting here in [**city**].

It's my great pleasure to be here at your Department Convention -- and an honor to be among friends. We share our commitment to the DAV's mission of bringing hope to our nation's sick and disabled veterans and their families. I'm here and available as you discuss our common goals for their future.

Success in the arena of veterans advocacy is the direct result of the dedication of men and women like you. Your passion to serve your fellow disabled veterans and their families is exemplary. Consequently, we do our best at the national level to reflect the same dedication and leadership you display in your communities.

Our mission begins with more than 250 professionally trained National Service Officers and 31 Transition Service Officers. Add to them our Department and Chapter Service Officers, and we set the standard for advocacy in representing generations of service-disabled veterans.

In the past year, our NSOs and TSOs represented about **300-thousand veterans** and their families. In doing so, they obtained more than **\$6 billion** in new and retroactive benefits. That's about 25 percent more than in 2010. I think that deserves a big round of applause...

(APPLAUSE)

It takes hard work to achieve that level of service. The keys are a dedicated membership, diligent Department and Chapter Service officers and our enhanced training and certification program.

The DAV succeeds because we have the right tools for the right job. We have more Mobile Service Offices. They are on the road more often than ever before. Last year's purchase of 10 new MSOs allowed us to donate some of the older units to Departments to expand our outreach efforts to meet the needs of more veterans in more places.

We owe a lot to our National, Department and Chapter Service Officers and Transition Service Officers. They are on the front lines of service to disabled veterans who come to us for help. So I'd like them to please stand to be recognized...

< applause >

The DAV has a force of more than **14-thousand volunteers** in VA medical facilities nationwide.

Last year, our volunteers donated **2.1 million hours of free service** to the patients and VA. Thank you for the sense of hope you give our veterans and their families, and for ensuring they enjoy the respect, dignity and honor they deserve.

Through the support of our Departments and Chapters, the DAV this year will donate 116 vans to the VA. They will join our fleet of vans taking veterans to medical appointments. Last year our volunteer drivers made nearly 640-thousand trips and donated 1.4 million hours.

Since we began our free transportation program in 1987, the DAV has purchased and donated about 25-hundred vans to the VA, at a cost of nearly \$54 million dollars.

I see in the audience several of our volunteers, Hospital Service Coordinators and volunteer drivers, please stand up for a much-deserved round of applause...

< applause >

We must take a moment to recognize our professional staff in Cincinnati and Washington. They are a truly hard-working, dedicated team.

Art Wilson, Marc Burgess and Barry Jesinoski have assembled a remarkable group of professionals working on behalf of our veterans.

We deeply appreciate all the members of their staffs who carry out our mission of service and hope with their outstanding skills and dedication.

< pause >

As we provide our service to veterans, we continue to strengthen our relationship with the VA, which is on the cusp of serious and needed reform of the claims process. We have been and continue working with the VA to ensure that disabled veterans and their families and survivors receive all the benefits they have earned and deserve, without undue delay.

< pause >

This year the VA will be rolling out its new electronic Veterans Benefits Management System. Rest assured the DAV will work closely with the Veterans Benefits Administration to ensure claims are properly handled in this new paperless environment.

The ultimate goal of this new system is to get each claim done right the first time. Yes, I know. We've heard it before. But only when the VA has adopted the culture of quality, accuracy and accountability will true reform in the claims process succeed.

The VA's goal is to decide claims within 125 days with a 98 percent accuracy rate. Bold ambitions. But why not? Our veterans deserve it.

It will take the combined strength of the DAV and the Auxiliary to see that these lofty goals become a reality.

< pause >

Congress continues to play a crucial role for us. The VA operates under the laws enacted by our elected representatives.

These laws are crucial to the lifetime journey of recovery for disabled veterans.

That's where each of you comes in. Your participation in our grassroots advocacy effort helps educate elected representatives and citizens about the issues vital to veterans and the families and caregivers whose lives have been altered forever by disability.

Your participation is especially critical as we enter an election year. Now, more than ever, it's important to remind candidates that veterans vote. Sending the right people to Washington next January is the down payment for getting meaningful policies and programs needed by our veterans. **You** are the key to educating lawmakers about our issues.

You can help overcome any reluctance lawmakers may have about fulfilling our promises to the men and women who have served and sacrificed for us all.

< pause >

I encourage you to stay current on the issues. Be aware of when you need to speak up. Most importantly, join the National Commander's Action Network. If you are on Facebook, follow the Commander's page at Facebook-dot-com-slash-national-commander. Or, visit our website: DAV-dot-org.

< pause >

We have a tough fight ahead of us. Congress wants to curb spending. There's talk of across-the-board budget cuts for every government agency, including the VA. We must be prepared to mobilize quickly to shield the VA from any cuts. Your help will be needed when the time comes for a push.

Let's quickly review some of the goals we have in Washington right now:

- There is a need for \$57.8 billion for veterans medical care, about \$1.5 billion more than requested in the President's budget;
- Further, \$28 million more is crucial to meet the *Independent Budget* of \$611 million for medical and prosthetic research;

- Plus almost \$4 billion is needed for VA construction funds;
- And we need to see an end to the unsubstantiated “management efficiencies” cited in a Government Accountability Office report which may have taken a billion dollars from VA health care.

Lastly, we need to be aware of the pressure on our lawmakers to cut spending due to the deficit and mounting national debt.

It is our responsibility to ensure that our elected representatives understand the importance of continued funding support for all VA programs and specialized health services.

We will not allow anyone to balance the budget on the backs of veterans.

< pause >

Your advocacy is clearly the foundation on which our mission prevails. I encourage you to look out for young veterans who need our support. It is now – at the beginning of their lives as disabled veterans – that we can do the most for them.

< pause >

Let us not forget there's a major event coming up. That's our 91st National Convention at Bally's Las Vegas Hotel and Casino this August 4th through the 7th.

We have a lot to do there. There will be plenty of opportunity for fun, as well.

< pause >

So, as we get down to business here in **[city]**, remember to honor our legacy of service and hope. Our young men and women veterans survived the horrors in Iraq and Afghanistan, only to return home as the wars left them – many, wounded in mind and body. Can we do anything less than our best for them? They need us, and they know we stand with them.

May God bless America. And, may God bless the DAV.

Thank you.

DAV ■ DAV ■ DAV