

**Remarks for
National Guests Attending
Department Conventions
2013**

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

The opportunity to stand before each of you today representing the national organization of DAV is a tremendous honor for me, and I greatly appreciate the opportunity.

It is a vital time for those of us dedicated to serving veterans.

There are nearly 1 million service-connected disability claims currently awaiting decisions. The Pentagon estimates 1 million service members will become veterans in the next five years. The VA's Veterans Benefits Administration has its work cut out for it, as they continue to work toward their goal of eliminating the backlog by 2015.

But they have something going for them – they are willing to listen to DAV. Secretary Eric Shinseki and Under Secretary for Benefits Allison Hickey continue to seek collaboration with our experienced National Service staff to develop and apply innovative solutions.

We are pleased that the VA is on the right track in implementing a modern, paperless system this year to process claims faster and more accurately.

While we realize there will always be setbacks when trying to make such sweeping changes, we are encouraged by the sustained focus on streamlining the claims process and eliminating the backlog.

In fact, just a couple months ago, a DAV NSO in Virginia used the new system to electronically submit the first-ever, from start to finish, fully paperless claim on behalf of a Vietnam veteran suffering from Parkinson's Disease.

The Veterans Benefits Management System, VBMS, is a web-based, electronic claims processing portal created to create the ability to process veterans' claims paper-free.

Using VBMS, our Service Officer scanned in and digitized the veteran's claim-related evidence, putting it into the VA's system.

The VA's staff will spend less time searching for and transferring paper records and can spend more time processing veterans' claims.

In short, all the relevant information about the veteran's claim is available instantly to VA employees working on the claim.

We realize transitioning to a paperless system is quite complex, especially given the vastness of the VA.

We hope the VA continues to work closely with us as they tweak the system, making improvements as it develops.

That said, uncertainty about funding for the VA could have far-reaching consequences for our nation's injured and ill veterans and their families.

I am sure you are working hard to provide meaningful resolutions to drive yet another well-defined legislative agenda.

We want Congress and the administration to strengthen the programs that are so vital to disabled veterans and their families.

[pause]

As I look out and see so many inspiring local leaders – many of whom are known throughout DAV – I'm reminded of the true purpose of our organization. You are the core of DAV's strength here in _____ (state).

DAV is only as strong as the men and women at the local level who extend our mission of hope, carry our service initiatives and selflessly work to ensure their fellow veterans where they live are not left behind.

It is in your honor that DAV has taken some very exciting steps to leverage your hard work here.

For several years now, DAV members have been asking some very important questions to the national organization.

We all know DAV does more for veterans and their families than any other service organization. But why, you asked, doesn't DAV

get the proper recognition deserved for those tremendous efforts?

The recent wars have led to an unprecedented number of new charitable initiatives, which is a positive sign, showing a new understanding between the public and those who serve.

In the decade since the war in Iraq began, we've helped millions of veterans to achieve a new level of independence, empowering them to care for their families.

But as we know, too often style trumps substance.

Why, our members have asked, isn't DAV given the same prominence as relative newcomers and organizations we outperform?

That is a fair question that weighs heavily on many minds at DAV National Headquarters, leading the organization to take a strategic look at our communications.

The new logo adopted by the National Executive Committee was chosen to accomplish two very important objectives. Firstly, it was developed to give DAV a distinctive look.

“Gunmetal Grey” and “Olive Drab Revisited” were chosen to honor our rich heritage and take a bold step into the modern era. The letters were

shaped to evoke a service theme – they recall chevrons and stencils.

But the more substantive change is under the letters where you see the tagline.

“Fulfilling Our Promises to the Men and Women Who Served” has been DAV’s focus since the days of Judge Marx.

Speaking of Judge Marx, I think a lot of people may have the wrong information about the difference between DAV’s logo and its seal.

The seal, featuring Columbia knighting an injured and kneeling World War I veteran, remains DAV’s congressionally chartered identifier.

The logo, which replaced a relatively new symbol in terms of DAV history, has a different job. The logo is something that is intended to help DAV achieve immediate goals.

While the logo may evolve over time with careful consideration, the seal will remain a proud part of our heritage and a visible identifier to our members.

But even as we retain and value our history, we're looking forward.

DAV is looking at its brand from the vantage of prospective members, veterans who need our assistance, and the public on whom we rely for support.

We know we have a great product because of the hard work you do here. We owe it to you to treat our brand in a way that honors your contributions.

The consistency with which you present DAV's brand here in _____ (state) is important. DAV has provided resources to help you use the new logo.

A Brand Stylebook is available on the "Members Only" section of the website, D-A-V dot org. We want all of you to use the logo and will do what we can to support your use.

While you're there, check out the "Language Guidebook," a resource developed to help you understand an "audience first" approach to communications.

The DAV Communications Department is working on additional resources to empower your Chapter and Department outreach efforts, to include training and tools to help you go out in your communities and engage the media.

If you have questions on any of these items or Social Networking, it's important to know that you can contact DAV's Communications Department in Cold Spring for guidance, feedback and support.

It's been a strong year for DAV in terms of branding results. We're being more proactive with the media and concentrating on areas where we can make an impact.

Our outreach campaign generated some **460 million gross impressions** in key areas around the country. Meanwhile, we released our new message featuring Gary Sinise as a nationwide television Public Service Announcement.

It's been seen by more than nine million people already and it was only released early this year.

DAV's social networking audience nearly doubled last year. Viral activity associated with DAV nearly tripled.

A nationwide digital membership outreach campaign achieved **39 million impressions**.

Prospective members are coming to us and signing up without being solicited to join. They're seeing the value of DAV's mission and membership.

In addition to digital outreach, our Membership Department has begun a new approach to solicitation that more closely mirrors our direct mail efforts.

We're customizing messages to prospective members based on their service eras and testing and revising our membership solicitation approach to increase response rates.

DAV is going to host a 5K run for the first time ever in Cincinnati to test how that could spread our message and generate funds in other areas.

We want to support the great initiatives you've begun that make a difference in your communities and give you opportunities to expand the profile of DAV in your communities.

I want to extend a special thanks to everyone here. I'd be remiss if I didn't thank the volunteers who are fulfilling the promise every day by driving, helping in VA hospitals, serving their chapters and assisting through the Local Veterans Assistance Program.

Your focus on service is inspiring. I don't remember a time in our history where DAV had more department and chapter service officers.

More is on the way.

Before National Convention, we'll see a new and exciting version of DAV.org. DAV magazine is available as an application on iPads and should be available for the Droid in months.

In short order, you should have a lot of new choices to make with DAV's streamlined, rebranded communications materials.

There is a lot to look forward to and I'm sure we're all going to grow from your efforts during the convention.

I hope you recognize the gratitude and respect you are owed by your fellow veterans. Mindful of our history, now is a time for us to focus on our legacy.

It is in the best interests of every veteran and his or her family to have a united and strong DAV.

That's what we inherited and that's what we intend to pass on.

Thank you for all you do to serve our community here in _____ (state) and for your hospitality.

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