



**Report of
National Commander – Elect
to the
DAV
92nd National Convention
Orlando, FL
August 10-13, 2013**

Let me ask my wife Vicki to step up to my side as I accept the responsibility you're placing in my hands today.

The love of my life and my closest, dearest friend, Vicki has been with me at every step of the way, a quiet yet determined leader in the DAV Auxiliary.

As Vicki travels with me during my term as National Commander, we as a couple will give visible form to the bond between DAV and the Auxiliary, partners in pursuit of bright new tomorrows for veterans and their families.

Ours is a DAV family. Our son James - James please stand – is himself an injured veteran and an officer in the Department of Ohio.

Okay, now please hold your applause, there's more than a dozen of us here:

- My son Brian is a retired chief warrant officer and attack helicopter pilot in the Cavalry.
- My daughter Heather is a lieutenant colonel in the Signal Corps.
- Michael, who is off to the University of Cincinnati this fall, will be in ROTC.
- Jeremy is a physician and did his internship serving veterans at the Cincinnati VA Medical Center.

All of us serve in one capacity or another – and I'm proud to say that every member of the family belongs to the Auxiliary. I'd ask for my family members who are here to please stand now. We are all on fire with devotion to the cause of America's veterans.

So you don't just get *me* today. You get the whole Johnston clan. And I hope your family is also aflame with the desire to create new tomorrows as well ... because we need everyone in this great mission. Absolutely everyone!

Commander Polzin, Adjutant Burgess, Delegates and friends ... each of you is crucial in forming the future of the great fellowship we call DAV. And in this cause, we are all equals.

Each has made his or her own sacrifice of blood or health in the cause of America – the great cause of freedom. All of those sacrifices were meaningful, some quite life-changing.

And each of us plays an essential role in realizing the vision we've discussed at length over the past few days.

This is why, as I accept the great responsibility you place on my shoulders this afternoon, I turn around and place my greatest hopes upon your shoulders.

I don't want you to leave this hall inspired this afternoon.

I want your spirit to be filled with fire as you head back to your Chapter and your Department.

I hope your thoughts will sizzle with the hope that lifted the hearts of the speakers you heard in this hall and in the seminars you attended.

I hope DAV's new vision will light up every word you say about what you experienced here in Orlando.

I want that flame to burn so brightly that it will set fire to the heart of every DAV and Auxiliary member you meet.

The need for your burning fervor is critical right now because we face challenges in our nationwide community and for our organization. There's no doubt about that, but look at our history.

The members of DAV and its Auxiliary are determined people.

In times of adversity, we are people who struggle ... people who overcome obstacles ... people who come out on top, despite the odds stacked against us.

That was DAV's fighting legacy under the adjutancy of Dale Adams – a legacy that continued under Art Wilson, a great leader who took us into the 21st century.

Today, we watch Marc Burgess step up with the fire of a new generation of American veterans burning in his heart. Together with Marc, you and I face a time of rapid change in the world.

During this convention, you've heard about the legislative perils that lurk in the dark corners of Washington, D.C.

We cannot kid ourselves. The danger is real, very real. That's why we must build a fire under Congress and win advance appropriations for the entire VA budget – not just health care.

We need to ensure the integrity of the VA health care infrastructure. What good is it to have the best health care system in the world housed in facilities that are becoming increasingly old and run down?

It's chilling to imagine what lies ahead for the next generation of veterans when we literally are not building a future for them today.

Without an adequate construction budget, there is a real danger that the troops in combat today in Afghanistan and around the world will have no infrastructure in which to receive care when their war is over.

We must fan the flame under the VA to make sure all veterans receive quality, timely service on an equal basis – and that includes women who served in our armed forces.

We must make sure the hearts of the American people remain ablaze with respect and gratitude for veterans who sacrificed their blood and their health for our nation.

We must maintain DAV's superb reputation for integrity and good management of the funds the American people donate to our cause.

We must expand our outreach to the public in general so people keep veterans forever in their thoughts.

Finally, we must stoke the furnace of DAV's internal strength – growing membership as we expand outreach to an ever broader audience of those eligible to join our organization and its Auxiliary.

In firing up internal strength, we must follow through on promises made to our Chapters at this convention – giving them resources for social networking, and empowering them with the technology and resources that will make them a force at the grassroots level.

In this, I ask our Chapter and Department leaders to look for ways you can engage veterans in your community.

DAV's strength depends on the services and outreach we provide in our communities. As leaders in DAV, it is our responsibility to recognize and inspire those who are active and encourage others to become involved.

Every challenge I've cited is big, but I have confidence in your ability to create new tomorrows.

With the flame of passion in our hearts, you and I can – and will – meet every challenge that confronts veterans who sacrificed their blood and their health for America.

Holding our ground as veterans who made great sacrifices in defense of our nation will not be enough for you and me. Nor will it be sufficient to merely protect our families from the whims of fate.

With the fervor of DAV's new vision blazing ever before us, you and I will lead America's veterans into the days to come. You and I have the vision and the values that will make those coming days real for everyone.

Think of this: DAV and its Auxiliary are not just organizations for veterans and their families.

We are family – an extended family of brother and sister warriors, united in an eternal way. We are bound together by bonds of brotherly and sisterly love that no civilian can ever or will ever understand.

For many of us war is not about the mission. Nor is war really about the enemy, or even about patriotism.

War is about the man or woman on your right or your left – about the camaraderie, the esprit de corps, the glue that holds the United States military together.

I'm talking about "we" and "us," all of us together. I'm not talking about "I" and "me," as if our interests were somehow separate.

But **we** know we cannot do it alone.

First, I am a man of faith, something for which I will never apologize. I am here because a loving God looked over me in times of war and peace. He is a God whose will I seek to do in every act I take, including my service to you in our great organization.

Next, I know I would not be alive today without the men and women with whom I served in Vietnam.

And I wouldn't be on stage today without my extended DAV and DAVA family from the Department of Ohio who have supported me and given me opportunities to serve and lead.

I joined DAV for many of the same reasons I enlisted and stayed in the Army. I wanted to be a part of something bigger than myself. I wanted to be part of a team.

I speak of all the great things that define us as individuals, equally valuable but not better than one another. I speak of the bond we share as men and women who know grace; who have seen wrath and – with the help of God and one another – overcome tremendous obstacles.

In that light, we're not defined by race, creed, gender or age. Rather, we are joined by our character and zeal as warriors – people whose “hearts were touched with fire,” as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., said to his fellow veterans in the wake of the Civil War.

Patrick Henry, one of my ancestral uncles, said, “Give me liberty or give me death.”

Those heated words inflamed the hearts of patriots in his day ... and today, they still set fire to the hearts of those who cherish the blessings we have in this country.

These are words that inspired you and me to write a check once – a check made out to the United States of America – for an amount up to *and including* life itself.

While no one in this room had to pay the full amount on that check, my brothers and sisters, *everyone* in this room paid a heavy price for freedom.

This defines us as that elite corps – less than one half of one percent of the American people – who are eligible for DAV membership.

This makes us one united force in our sacred duty to all who, like us, came home ill or injured from service to this magnificent country.

Our unique identity provides the fuel that fires the passion that brought you and me and all of us to Orlando for this convention.

We are bound together by character, committed to the common good of our sisters and our brothers, as well as our deep compassion for their families.

We are bound by the fire we will carry out of this place ... back to our states and back to our communities ... back to the veterans you and I serve through our Departments and Chapters.

Thank you, my sisters and brothers.

Thank you for allowing me to serve you as your National Commander. And thank you for everything you do to empower your organization and the veterans you and I serve together.