

**Remarks for
National Guests Attending
Department Conventions
2014**

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

The opportunity to stand before each of you today as your national guest is a tremendous honor for me, and I'm humbled to be among so many people who care so much about our organization and our nation's heroes.

We have much to take pride in from the past year, but more importantly, we have exciting plans to build on moving forward.

On the final day of this year's Mid-Winter Conference, we grabbed the nation's attention and made Congress and the White House take notice.

With veterans and supporters waving signs and chanting, “Keep the promise,” right in front of the U.S. Capitol Building, DAV kicked off “Operation: Keep the Promise.”

There were *hundreds* of veterans and supporters from around the county there (including some of you), and there were *millions* around the country learning about advance appropriations that day and telling their friends online and calling on Congress to make the legislation a reality.

More than 10,000 calls and emails were sent to U.S. senators and representatives that day. And more than 11.5 million people using social media, urged Congress to pass advance funding for all veterans benefits, programs and services.

As we do every year, veterans fanned out across Capitol Hill to meet face to face with their lawmakers, but there was a renewed sense of purpose and urgency in the messages they were delivering: Shield the Department of Veterans Affairs from Washington's near perpetual budget gridlock.

Last October nearly every agency in the civil service was thrown into shutdown status and chaos for 16 long days. But because in 2009 we fought for and achieved advance appropriations for VA health care, VA medical facilities and their employees and staff continued normal operations, caring for hundreds of thousands of injured, wounded and ill veterans as if no shutdown was underway.

Other important VA programs, however, suffered through the shutdown, then reduced, and nearly eliminated, vital services to veterans – because they began to run out of money.

As many of you know, our service officers around the country moved into temporary quarters, including tents, when VA regional offices were shut down. We would not allow Washington's dysfunction to interrupt DAV's free representational services to veterans, despite veterans being locked out of our offices at VA benefits locations.

This is not a partisan issue; not a Democratic or Republican issue; it's a Veterans issue, and it is DAV's highest priority. Your help will continue to be needed on this.

(Pause)

A major effort is underway to continue increasing DAV's visibility in impactful, strategic ways so that more and more Americans know the great things you are doing for our fellow injured and ill veterans and their families and survivors.

Staff in Cold Spring are creating television messages that will air around the country, letting people know about our important mission and giving them the opportunity to support our organization. Not only will these fuel fundraising for DAV, they will help us expand and extend our services.

At the same time, we're ramping up opportunities to bring the national spotlight to our organization and will be working on a national media partnership around Veterans Day to bring more attention to our cause.

In order to address a vital need in the nationwide community of disabled veterans, DAV just established an Employment Department to enhance our organization's abilities to empower veterans by overseeing special employment initiatives, including job fairs, and working with the private and public sectors to develop and build partnerships to address joblessness and underemployment.

Jeff Hall has taken the reins as our National Employment Director, and Danny Soto is the Assistant National Employment Director. Both, now based at National Headquarters, will be instrumental in facilitating programs, events and services to support professional empowerment for veterans.

(Pause)

Last year, we launched the inaugural DAV 5K Walk, Run or Ride to raise awareness of our important work.

On a brisk, cold morning just before Veterans Day, more than 2,500 participants turned out for an amazingly powerful event in downtown Cincinnati.

At the finish line, Past National Commander Richard Marbes reminded everyone that events honoring veterans and their families are much bigger than individual achievements.

National Adjutant Marc Burgess declared the pilot event a success. It was a way for the public to experience DAV and show their commitment to our cause. Adjutant Burgess said his staff is looking at ways to expand the event beyond Cincinnati, hopefully adding one new 5K venue each year, which will be of tremendous value to every aspect of our mission.

(Pause)

Speaking of value...

We have about 280 professionally trained National Service Officers and 35 Transition Service Officers who are on the front lines serving our veterans every day.

They are the ones who provide direct assistance to our injured and ill veterans – and they are the face of DAV to those who seek our help.

Meanwhile, Department and Chapter Service Officers are backing them up to ensure that our fellow veterans who need service get the finest representation possible.

Our service officer training program is second to none and is constantly being updated so we can do even better than before.

I'd like all our National Service Officers, Transition Service Officers, and Department and Chapter Service Officers to please stand to be recognized...

(Pause)

Thank you sincerely for your continued hard work and dedication for DAV service.

(Applause)

In addition to our professional services, the DAV and Auxiliary have nearly 14,000 volunteers in VA hospitals and clinics. We also have more than 9,000 volunteer drivers in our Transportation Network.

Since we began our free Transportation Network program in 1987, DAV has purchased and donated 2,714 vehicles to the VA, at a cost of 57.6 million dollars.

So far our vans have carried veterans more than 589 million miles to and from their medical appointments. This program serves veterans in every state and every congressional district in the country.

I see quite a few of our volunteers and Hospital Service Coordinators here. Why don't you stand up for a much-deserved round of applause...

(Applause)

You are truly an inspiration to your community and our nation. Thank you.

(Pause)

Before I finish, I want to recognize our professional staff in Cold Spring and Washington. They have enormous responsibilities.

Mark Burgess, Barry Jesinoski and Garry Augustine and their teams are our nation's finest professionals in the area of veterans advocacy.

We deeply appreciate all that they do to fulfill our mission of service and hope.

My thanks also go out to our counterparts in the Auxiliary.

The leadership of Auxiliary National Commander Susan Miller and National Adjutant Judy Hezlep provide vital support for our programs. The Auxiliary truly is a blessing to DAV.

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 future.

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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