



FULFILLING OUR PROMISES
TO THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVED

Remarks of
Barry Jesinoski,
Executive Director, National Headquarters
To the
Delegates of the 93rd
DAV National Convention
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Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

National Commander Johnston, guests and delegates to our 93rd National Convention of DAV, it's certainly my privilege to share what's going on at DAV National Headquarters and what's coming in the future as we grow – and we are growing.

First, I want to thank National Commander Johnston for his leadership and guidance in what was a very fast-paced and busy year for DAV. And I thank National Adjutant Burgess. Your vision for plotting our course and the direction we have taken this year has truly taken DAV to a new level in terms of our approach to the business of fulfilling our promises to the men and women who have served.

If there is one thing instilled in DAV's culture, it's that maintaining the status quo is a sure path to mediocrity. Veterans are exceptional people. And the veterans who comprise DAV are particularly exceptional because they have sacrificed and overcome tremendous adversity just to qualify for membership.

As such, DAV members rightfully demand and deserve the exceptional from those who comprise our professional staff. I'm proud of the hard work our team has put forward this year and feel confident that the results of our efforts and the strategic direction we are taking for the future will yield tremendous results.

DAV is evolving.

We're doing so because it's the right thing to do for the veterans we serve, and we're doing so because it is completely necessary for the future of our organization. We're staying true to our values, but finding ways we can use technology and emerging resources to improve our efficiency and increase awareness for our organization.

When I talk about DAV's values, I'm talking primarily about service. That's what we're all about. How we serve our nation's veterans and the core functions of our organization are important.

I'm proud of our efforts in this area.

It includes infrastructure. DAV is thoughtfully, but aggressively, working on a software solution that will replace many of the applications we use in the areas of fundraising, membership, voluntary services and other areas.

This application, called DAV 360, is going to take time to implement, in fact, years. But it's going to give us a 360-degree view and understanding of our data while consolidating and streamlining our processes.

In short, it's going to improve the way we function as an organization and put DAV ahead of the curve in terms of how we serve our volunteers, donors and members.

Of equal or greater importance is our work to replace our current Case Management System. Our current CMS is eight years old and has served us well. But, when it comes to the work DAV service officers do, we need and deserve the very best resources. This new system will give us more flexibility and allow us to better integrate with future changes we anticipate the VA to make as the claims process becomes increasingly digital.

It's also going to improve our services for veterans and provide up-to-the-second access to information for our hard working department and chapter service officers who augment and support DAV's service efforts.

As Adjutant Burgess said, we know that DAV has to improve our recognition among the veterans who need our assistance and the public on whom we rely for support. There is a great deal of work going into changing the way we handle outreach.

For the first time in our history, as we saw with Regis Philbin here, we've begun using direct response television messages to engage monthly donors. I cannot overemphasize how important recurring donors can be to the long-term health of our organization. In addition to Regis' participation, these messages feature a few other prominent VIPs. This one may look familiar to all of us...

We are all very aware of the hero featured there -- our own Past National Commander Bobby Barrera.

In addition to receiving pledges of support, we're taking calls that connect veterans, their dependents or survivors with our free services.

We are on track to reach our goals through this new initiative. And though we haven't anticipated a windfall for DAV, the type of donors we are engaging are of incredible value.

The more frequently a prospective donor encounters our message, the more likely it is that they too will join DAV's Honor Guard to maintain the long-term health of DAV and fuel our services.

As many of you know, we also hosted the first-ever DAV 5K Run/Walk/Roll and motorcycle ride to Honor Veterans.

The event hosted in Cincinnati drew 2,500 participants and put our cause on center stage both in the heart of downtown and on every local network as the public was anticipating Veterans Day. In this clip, National Adjutant Burgess will tell you more.

We're expanding to San Diego this year and will now host two events in the Veterans Day time frame and will look to add a new city every year for the next ten years or so to expand outreach, connect with communities and raise funds to support our mission.

We're also looking at how we can most efficiently make our fellow citizens and veterans aware of all we offer through Public Service Announcements.

This year we're going beyond television releases of our PSAs and will be reaching out to stations and entities who wish to donate billboards, outdoor advertising, radio and print messages for free.

The creative work we're putting out there advertises our services, promotes our branding and builds upon the relationship we need to have with the American public.

It also reminds the public that veterans come in many different ages, genders and races and that all deserve our utmost respect.

We're making the "V" more prominent to brand our connection with veterans and feel already our branding and outreach efforts have proven successful in many key areas.

We'll also have a new television message that we'll be asking station managers to run to build awareness for the organization.

We're seizing new opportunities.

In addition to DAV's national release, we've had an invaluable friend in Inspire Network over the past two years. At no cost, they've helped us with a series of three public service announcements highlighting veterans and expanding on our efforts to build a relationship with the American public...

Again, these messages have been produced at no cost to DAV and can be seen wherever cable or satellite providers carry I-N-S-P. In partnership, we are working on a new series focusing on women veterans and we look forward to more of their support in the future.

They're here today at a booth outside and if you get a chance stop by and thank them for all they're doing to raise awareness of our cause.

Just days ago, we wrapped filming for messages we'll be presenting in partnership with the History Channel and their popular series "American Pickers." These broadcast segments, which will air in conjunction with programming leading up to Veterans Day, will include messaging about DAV and feature the show's star, Mike Wolfe.

Our work with Chapters and Departments is something that is encouraged all the way from the top and we're seeing more and more news related to DAV's volunteer efforts and fraternal activities across the country.

In addition to a new publicity guide and brand resources, we're looking to provide training to give our members the tools they need to spread awareness and fuel support for our core initiatives.

I can't mention DAV's volunteer efforts and the media without mentioning that the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic that we co-host with VA received significant attention on many national outlets.

It was prominently featured on Fox and Friends and the Today Show aired an entire segment on the program.

As we forge ahead with new ideas and initiatives, we're not forgetting our core competencies. Volunteers continue to be the primary asset that extends our mission and message of hope nationwide.

Here's a quick look at the event and what it means to those who participate.

Seeing some of our most profoundly disabled veterans overcoming obstacles in that environment is amazing.

We met a gentleman named Lonnie Bedwell. Lonnie is legally blind.

For fun, he does things like kayaking the entire 212 miles of the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon – solo. The only aid he had was a guide in a separate boat in front of him. Lonnie earned a world record for that, by the way.

Like all of our veterans, Lonnie is resilient and creative. We learned this when we found out he's an avid downhill skier. He uses a coach in front of him with a cowbell attached so he can follow the sound and a coach behind him with a two-way radio.

We have members like Laurie Wood, who suffered a spinal cord injury while in uniform. Yet, she says the only time she's vulnerable is when her nail polish is wet.

At the clinic, Laurie was literally a terror on the ice during the sled hockey events and she scaled the rock-climbing wall as well. She said that adaptive sports saved her life, but I believe she is giving back to our veteran community tenfold as she inspires others with her confidence, determination and her great sense of humor.

As Marc mentioned in his report, we received some somber news during the Winter Sports Clinic that another shooting tragedy had, again, struck Fort Hood, Texas.

While that type of news is never well received, it was particularly difficult for Army veteran Patrick Zeigler.

Patrick had been shot four times by Nidel Hasan at the first Fort Hood incident years before and was at the event to recover from four gun shots.

As the story broke, he was taking his ill wife to the hospital.

But we made sure he knew he wasn't alone.

DAV and Patrick's fellow veterans were there for him. Amazingly, he was not bitter for his losses, but instead delivered a message of hope and condolences for the families of the victims.

He thanked his home state DAV in Minnesota for their ongoing support. They had just held a benefit to help his service dog get food and supplies.

He is a hero.

And he – in his audacious courage – epitomized the determination we've seen every year from DAV Freedom Award Recipients.

While the clinic is a time of infinite glory, nothing compares in context to the work our volunteers are doing inside and out of VA Medical Centers.

It's hard to attach a dollar figure on the sheer importance of dedicated volunteers making positive impacts on America's veterans. But, we know DAV Transportation Network volunteers donated nearly \$40 million worth of work in 2013 alone.

Let's look real quick at our Transportation Network through a couple of the 9,000 amazing individuals who make it possible.

Like volunteer John Tiry from DAV Billings, Montana, Chapter 10 who manages DAV's Transportation Network in the entire eastern half of Montana. That's not a light job, considering Montana is a frontier state with miles of rural areas. Jimmie Kerr of that Chapter has driven 245,974 miles and has transported 3,046 veterans. That's equated to nearly 8,000 hours of time he gave back to his veteran community.

Clayton Morgan, from right here in Nevada, has 796,239 miles to his credit helping veterans.

As you can see from the graphic above, those numbers didn't invent themselves. Our volunteers make it all possible.

Our volunteers in our Transportation Network drove almost 26-million miles in 2013.

Then there are the volunteers inside the hospitals whose special thanks to our nation's heroes truly extend the gratitude our heroes have earned for their dedication.

The Commander will recognize some of our top volunteers this morning, but I'd like to ask everyone here to consider how you may be able to encourage volunteerism within DAV.

There are so many things to do. Volunteers can assist through the Local Veterans Assistance Program that credits nearly any support or talent that serves those who serve. And we need more young folks to pursue our Jesse Brown Memorial Youth Scholarship, we know that we can benefit from more participation, and your help to bring more into our fold is greatly appreciated.

As I said, we remain true to our values and remember the keys to success for our organization.

Just as sergeants and petty officers are the backbone of America's military, our members are the backbone of DAV. New members strengthen our voice before Congress and the Administration.

Recruiting is an area where you here today have been amazingly exceptional.

Commander Johnston, Adjutant Burgess and ladies and gentlemen, I'm proud of the efforts that resulted in all DAV Departments reaching their recruiting goals for the second consecutive year!

Further, more than 80% of our Chapters have reached their individual recruiting goals! While other VSOs are declining in membership, DAV is maintaining and building and that's something we should all be proud of.

Though this is a remarkable achievement, it's not an area where we can afford to rest. In the next few years, thousands of men and women will shed their uniforms and, as we all here can attest, make the very challenging transition from military service to begin civilian life again.

Many of these service members are unaware of the benefits they've earned through service and they'll need our help the most. So long as we assist them and give them meaningful opportunities to serve, we'll continue to grow in the years ahead.

We're also aware of the unmet needs facing our fellow veterans. And this year we've determined to tackle one of the most significant of them all.

For the first time in many years, as Adjutant Burgess mentioned, DAV launched a new initiative this summer by establishing the DAV Employment Department. Even before newly-appointed Director Jeff Hall and Assistant Director Danny Soto had a chance to pack and move to National Headquarters, we had a partnership inked with RecruitMilitary to host some 65 all-veteran career fairs nationwide.

That means we'll be connecting some 26,000 veterans with in-person job opportunities with employers who value veterans and want to hire them. Many more will be able to connect with listings and resources through tools we've made available on DAV.org.

There too, veterans can learn about our partnership with NCOA. Through NCOA career fairs, DAV service officers are assisting with making sure, in addition to employment opportunities, veterans are able to learn and receive assistance with claims for VA benefits.

A veteran's transition from injury in uniform to a quality civilian life is not complete until he or she is truly able to pursue their maximum potential. For veterans who can work, that means getting a job and being able to support their families. If you've helped a veteran with his or her claim, you know that this is one piece where, at one time or another, you wished DAV could help more.

Now we are, and our new Employment Department will build a strong network, with all those concerned about connecting veterans with jobs, such as Local Veterans Employment Representatives, Disabled Veteran Outreach Program Specialists, VR&E Counselors, and corporate recruiters

This is just a snapshot of what we've been up to at National Headquarters. I want to thank my staff who are doing an exceptional job of implementing these ambitious and critical programs.

I also want to thank Adjutant Burgess and National Commander Johnston for your guidance and support and our Board of Directors and National Executive Committee for ensuring we have the resources necessary to pursue our vision for the future.

Thank you Commander. This concludes my report.