



FULFILLING OUR PROMISES
TO THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVED

Remarks of
Joseph J. Johnston,
National Commander
To the
Delegates of the 93rd
DAV National Convention
Las Vegas, Nevada
Saturday, August 9, 2014

Hello Friends!

Thanks so much for that welcome. It's been a busy year for DAV and, as you are aware, there are lots of important issues our great organization is tackling even as we speak.

This year, we championed Operation Keep the Promise, and rallied our brother and sister veterans right on the footsteps of Capitol Hill.

It's important for all of us to keep the pressure on Congress to make them do what's right—to enact legislation for advanced appropriations for VA services, programs and infrastructure. I encourage you all to get involved. Use the DAV commander's action network tool on our website and, with a few clicks of a button, you can let your elected officials know you stand with DAV.

In the past year, I'm proud to say we've officially activated the DAV Employment Department. In the next few years, nearly half a million veterans will make the all-important and challenging transition...hanging up the uniform to returning to their civilian lives.

Many of these men and women have served their entire military career while the nation has been at war. Now they return home looking to start fresh. Hiring a veteran is the right thing to do ... it's the smart thing to do...and we need to communicate that to potential employers.

Veterans bring a lot to the table when it comes to making an organization successful, and we can do no less than help veterans and their families in the search for gainful employment after all they have sacrificed.

We all saw what happened at the VA earlier this year and the ensuing media storm that followed.

In my view, Secretary Shinseki was, and still is, an honorable man. He, like us, is a disabled veteran. But the issues surrounding the VA are bigger than just one person. The secretary chose to do the honorable thing by accepting responsibility for the mistakes made by subordinates, but that alone does not fix the central issue. Quite frankly, the problem boils down to resources.

For more than a decade, DAV and other VSOs have submitted an independent budget to congress outlining what the VA needed to operate efficiently. We also warned lawmakers time and time again of the growing needs of the veteran community. To start, many of our Vietnam veterans were entering the VA system while, at the same time, our nation was beginning to draw down from thirteen years of war.

And despite this rapid influx, our recommendations were ignored every time.

DAV believes that veterans placed on any type of waiting list should have the option to be seen immediately by a medical provider in the private sector. However, we also want to make sure the VA continues to have the ability to coordinate the veterans care and ensure continuity of treatment with the VA health care system.

We call for an open and transparent investigation into this matter and, if there are findings of wrongdoing, we demand those people be held accountable for their actions.

But that alone will not cure all that ails an overburdened, underfunded system.

Finally, Congress must fully fund the VA without any political gimmicks or posturing so we can fix the root of the problem, which is access to the quality care our veterans have earned.

There are not enough healthcare professionals nor space to meet the current demand of veteran healthcare.

This is nothing new – and we've told Congress this before.

With the momentum of an election cycle behind us, I sincerely hope they'll listen, and take these matters to heart.

If they don't, we need to hold them accountable with our voices...and...our votes.

While DAV's service to veterans and their families and our advocacy before congress is important, I think it's also important to remind ourselves from time to time of the very freedoms every person here enjoys...the freedom to peaceably assemble like we have here today...<PAUSE>...the freedom to worship as we please...<PAUSE>...the freedom to elect our representatives in government... <PAUSE>...and the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They have all been won and protected by men and women who raised their hands and took an oath.

To wear the nation's uniform is the greatest commitment to our country and your community that anyone can make.

Caring for those who make that brave choice is the right thing to do and by being a part of our organization, you help further that mission.

Like all veterans, military service changed me. But the simple fact is anyone who has served in the military is going to be changed by the experience.

My homecoming from Vietnam was vastly different than my homecoming from the first gulf war.

I think we've come a long way as a country in that regard.

Despite your politics, despite your views on whatever direction the government is going, I believe we have learned it is absolutely the right thing to do to welcome home the service man or woman and help them transition into civilian life.

That's where we come in, and I am proud to be a part of an organization that helps veterans with more than three-hundred thirty thousand claims for benefits each year. We know each of those claims represents a sacrifice made in service.

We are also aware there are many more who need our assistance. Returning veterans may not have known where to turn, but for me, this organization is home...and I hope it will be for many more to come.

It has been my absolute privilege to be your national commander and represent you this year. Meeting many of you in my travels was an honor I will never forget and will cherish always.

I would take this opportunity to thank the members of the Department of Ohio. You have been my steadfast support, my friends and comrades these many years. I could not have accomplished my duties as National Commander without you. Please stand and be recognized.

To my family and dearest friend, Vicki, mere thanks are not enough for your support and love. From packing a suitcase to pictures of the event to slapping me around when I needed it. I love you all very much.

We've done great things but there's much more to be done and I know we can do it.

Now, in the parlance of military tradition, please allow me the honor of offering you one of my last salutes after a fruitful and blessed year of service.

You have my respect, my commitment and my lifelong friendship. May god bless you and may god bless the United States of America.