



**FULFILLING OUR PROMISES**  
TO THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVED

**Remarks for National Guest**  
**Department Conventions**  
**2015**

*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. I'm proud to represent National Commander Hope and National Adjutant Burgess who extend their heartfelt gratitude to all of you.

I'm humbled to be among so many people who care so much about our organization and our nation's heroes. You are DAV in this state and your leadership makes our mission possible.

2014 was an eventful year for DAV and the veteran community at large. The VA waitlist scandal that emerged last year led to new leadership at VA, but the faith of the veteran community was deeply and understandably shaken.

Robert McDonald – or Bob as he likes to be called – has been hard at work trying to implement changes, bringing private sector business sensibility to this government-run organization. He has also been busy implementing the new Veterans Choice Program as part of the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014, made law last August.

The program gives veterans enrolled in VA healthcare the option to receive non-VA healthcare if they meet certain eligibility requirements. Initial participation has been lower than expected, and there is a lot of debate over the long-term plans for this program. What we know for sure is that for veterans to maintain their full continuum of care, VA must be strengthened and protected.

This, as always, remains critical to providing our nation's heroes with the care they deserve. We want to ensure veterans receive quality care within an acceptable timeframe, and we support efforts to make that possible – as long as we can be sure there is accountability and oversight into the system. There are some who believe shrinking the VA is the answer. But we believe VA offers veterans something unique and irreplaceable by private sector care. Outside the VA, no one can guarantee veterans priority outside the VA, no one can guarantee the quality of care, and no one can guarantee accountability.

We need more doctors, improved facilities and better management – absolutely. And there must be real fixes for the critical problems that have come to light. But these problems were not created overnight, and they cannot be solved overnight. We have to give VA time, under new leaders, to implement the changes that will create a better system for veterans.

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Looking back on the last year, perhaps our biggest victory came in the final hours of 2014, when Congress agreed to include advance appropriations for veteran benefits payments as part of the federal omnibus spending bill in December.

DAV's push to secure this legislation began back in October 2013, when every agency in the civil service was thrown into shutdown status and chaos for 16 long days.

During that time, DAV's corps of service officers kicked into overdrive – setting up makeshift offices to ensure DAV could still see veterans and manage their claims. Payments to veterans – disability, education, and retirement benefits – were nearly halted as the shutdown stretched on.

In response, as you know, DAV kicked off “Operation: Keep the Promise” to get legislation passed that would protect those benefits payments in the future.

Throughout the remainder of 2014, millions of veterans and supporters learned more about advance appropriations through DAV communications efforts and called on Congress to make the legislation a reality.

With that victory under our belts, we knew this effort had to be continued...

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DAV is continuing to build on the success of last year's "Operation: Keep the Promise" in 2015. This year's campaign is focusing on two of DAV's major legislative efforts for the year – expanding caregiver benefits to all generations of veterans, and continuing to fight for change on behalf of our nation's 2.4 million women veterans.

Currently, the VA's Caregiver Support Program only provides benefits to caregivers of veterans injured after 9/11. This policy excludes the needs of previous generations of veterans, and puts undue strain on their caregivers. DAV will work diligently to expand caregiver benefits such as stipends, healthcare, and respite care for caregivers of all ill and injured American veterans of all eras.

In September, DAV released a landmark report entitled “Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home,” which is the most comprehensive assessment to date of the policies and programs for women veterans at various federal agencies.

The report identifies 27 key policy and programmatic changes that are needed to overhaul the culture and services provided by the federal government. It will also serve as a guide for DAV legislative efforts on behalf of women veterans in the future.

DAV will continue advocating for changes, from creating gender-sensitive mental health programs, to equipping VA Medical Centers with the ability to adequately treat victims of sexual assault, and establishing a pilot program of structured transition support groups for women.



A promise was made to our men and women who sacrificed for and served our nation, and through these legislative efforts, DAV will continue our efforts to empower them to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity.

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Speaking of respect and dignity, we know that employment is a key component of a veteran's successful transition into civilian life. In 2014, our new Employment Department gave more than 14,000 transitioning service members, veterans and their spouses access to a broad array of employers and career resources at 34 DAV All Veterans Job Fairs across the country. This year, we will double the number of these events to provide even more families with these critical resources.

Veterans who can't make it out to our employment events don't need to worry, though. They can now find a job online by simply visiting our Veterans Employment Resources webpage and entering their location and a keyword in our Veterans Job Search tool. This easy-to-use tool is just one example of DAV's commitment to helping veterans find post-military employment, and ensuring their respect and dignity remain intact after their service.

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After launching the inaugural DAV 5K Walk, Run or Ride in Cincinnati two years ago, DAV expanded the event to include San Diego in 2014.

Nearly 4,000 people took part in the two events this past year – helping the public experience DAV and raise awareness of our important work. The goal is to add at least one new 5K venue each year, and this year we're adding Atlanta to the slate.

DAV also sponsored a NASCAR race for the first time. Through a nationwide television audience, the DAV 200-Honoring America's Heroes at Phoenix International Raceway helped raise awareness of DAV's free services for veterans and their families. It did not, however, improve anyone's disability rating for hearing loss.

DAV has about 275 professionally trained National Service Officers and 34 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's free services to veterans and their families.

**< Applause >**

In addition to our professional services, DAV and DAV's Auxiliary have nearly 11,000 volunteers in VA hospitals and clinics. More than 2,700 additional DAV volunteers render services outside the VA system through our Local Veterans Assistance Program.

Last year alone, nearly half-a-million volunteer hours were provided in local communities nationwide through the program by directly assisting veterans, engaging in outreach and fundraising efforts, and supporting DAV Departments and Chapters. We expect L-VAP volunteer numbers to substantially improve in the near future as we work to improve our volunteer reporting process at the Department and Chapter levels.

DAV also has 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 2,856 vehicles to the VA, at a cost of 61.8 million dollars. The Ford Motor Company has also donated 192 vehicles at a cost of 4.4 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 believe we have some 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.

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

Adjutant Burgess, Barry Jesinoski, 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 LeeAnn Karg and National Adjutant Pat Kemper provide vital support for our programs. The DAV 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 given 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.