



Speaker's Name

Speech Theme/Occasion: 2016 Dept. Convention Guest

Speech Date

Speech Writer: Steven Wilson

Location

SPEECH

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

The opportunity to speak with you today as your guest is a tremendous honor for me. I'm very proud to represent National Commander McIntosh and National Adjutant Burgess who extend their best wishes and heartfelt thanks for all of the wonderful work you are doing here in _____. Your leadership in the state and in your local communities represents our nation's veterans in remarkable ways.

Before the end of the year, our nation will collectively mark a historical turning point in our history. This December is the 75th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

After the attack, America mobilized like never before. More than 16 million men and women wore the uniform and nearly 700,000 returned home wounded or injured from service.

Much has changed since 1941.

But what has remained constant is the need to ensure promises made by our nation to the men and women who served are kept. That's where the people in this room come in.

Think about that mobilization of America in 1941 and that feeling that swept our nation. Everyone had a job to perform. Everyone was part of the cause.

Today, we know that one of your most valuable assets is time. Donating your time, and encouraging others to do the same, is one of the most direct ways you can be involved in DAV's mission of service to veterans and their families.

Volunteerism is a cornerstone of what we stand for and we cannot underestimate the value of volunteers and the services they provide to veterans.

If you're able and not otherwise engaged, consider getting involved in our Local Veterans Assistance Program—LVAP. This program lets us give back to veterans who are friends and neighbors. It allows us to see the direct impact on our community.

Since the inception of LVAP, more than 7,000 volunteers have donated over 2 million hours of service to veterans within their local communities.

But we're seeing that this noble work is being shouldered by fewer and fewer people, as our volunteers corps is aging and the baby boomer generation is staying employed longer than its predecessors.

Our transportation network needs help for the same reason. Last year, more than 700,000 rides were provided to and from medical appointments at no cost to the veteran. While this is something we can and should be proud of, if we are going to maintain this level of service to fellow veterans, we must continue to recruit and maintain volunteer drivers.

You'll see a story in the May/June edition of *DAV Magazine* about Chapter 20 in Tennessee, who started building ramps for local veterans to make it easier to access their homes. After one was built, more requests for ramps came in, then steadily more requests.

And as word got around, new veterans came out of the woodwork to join Chapter 20 members and begin helping with the construction projects. So not only were they ensuring veterans get the help they needed, they were bringing new members aboard—and we know that new blood will sustain our legacy into the future.

Sometimes all it takes is a listening ear and an infusion of creativity. Find out what your local veterans need and work to address those gaps. Please consider getting involved or telling your neighbors about this program, which is the only one of its kind and provides an absolutely critical service to veterans.

I believe we have some volunteers and Hospital Service Coordinators here. Why don't you stand up for a much-deserved round of applause...

<PAUSE>

I'd like to take just a moment to also share with you some important news coming out of Washington, DC. As many of you know, the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 mandated the establishment of a congressional commission to evaluate access throughout the VA health care system and provide recommendations for reform. Those recommendations are due June 30th.

But in mid-March, we learned that seven of the commission's 15 members had, without the knowledge or consent of their fellow commissioners, branched out to create what they refer to as a "Strawman Document." This document, which they then presented to the full commission, calls for the total elimination of VA by 2035 and for all taxpayer-funded functions to be privatized.

As you can imagine, this has raised serious concerns among the VSO communities, as well as at the White House, VA and within Congress. This has also created alarm among veterans—and we know from a bi-partisan, nationwide survey conducted last year that 80 percent of veterans oppose privatization of VA hospital programs and services regardless of their age, branch of service or political affiliation. This plan clearly does not represent their wishes or their best interests.

Beginning at this year's Mid-Winter Conference in DC, DAV launched a campaign to help set the record straight on many of these ideas—like privatization of VA—which sound good on the surface but would likely harm veterans in the long run. The "Setting the Record Straight" campaign includes a series of five short videos and op-eds to help explain these concerns and offer better solutions that would strengthen the VA for veterans today and well into the future.

I would encourage you to visit the Setting the Record Straight landing page at www.dav.org/settingtherecordstraight to review all the videos and to read through the op-eds. You can also share the videos right from this page and sign up for the Commander's Action Network—DAV CAN—if you haven't already done so.

It's a critical time to stay up-to-date with what's going on in Washington. Decisions will be made in the not too distant future that will impact us all. You can visit the DAV Facebook, Twitter and YouTube pages to find the latest content.

These are the kinds of conversations that should be happening at the Chapter and Department levels, and I hope they happen right here at the convention.

Please remember that you represent a sacred cause and more than 96 years of dedicated service to our nation's bravest. You should all be proud of the work you do, and 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. We inherited a strong DAV, and that's what we should be looking to leave behind us.

Thank you for all you do to serve our community here in
_____ (state) and for your hospitality.

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