

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

**(Acknowledge any VIPs/special guests)**

First and foremost, I want to begin today by recognizing all those among us who have been a part of the great brother- and sisterhood we call the U.S. military—our veterans, active-duty service members, guardsmen and reservists. It is your service and sacrifice that has kept our country safe and free. If you're able, please stand to be recognized.

<APPLAUSE>

No matter what branch you served in, whether you were peace time or war time, whatever your job path or how many years you served, raising your hand and committing yourself to service in the military was a brave and selfless act.

Thanks to those who have served and those who continue to serve today, America can sleep peacefully at night. Military men and women know the risks, but they accept them in many cases so that others won't have to.

DAV life member Gary "Mike" Rose accepted those risks when he enlisted in the United States Army during the height of the Vietnam War.

He knew of the increased dangers he would face when he joined the Special Forces, and he knew the hazards would grow exponentially when he volunteered for overseas duty.

In June 1970, his first mission after arriving in Vietnam resulted in a Purple Heart and Bronze Star with Valor. But it was just a few months later during "Operation Tailwind" in the North Vietnamese Army-controlled Laos where the medic's heroic actions would—more than 45 years later—result in the Medal of Honor. Just last month, Rose received the nation's highest military honor for his selfless efforts to care and safeguard fellow soldiers wounded in the bloody four-day battle.

Of the 16 Americans who were on that mission, not one of them left Laos unscathed. But they all returned home, and 33 Purple Hearts were awarded. Then-Sergeant Rose received two of them as a result of being hit with shrapnel from a rocket-propelled grenade in the back, foot and hand.

Despite an overwhelming enemy force, debilitating injuries and a helicopter crash during the final mission extraction, Rose never gave up. Facing insurmountable odds, he refused to quit.

That refusal to back down is something I have seen day in and day out by my fellow veterans and DAV members. That fighting spirit on the battlefield carries over as they embark upon the road to recovery. They refuse to back down. They recognize that life may be different—but it is certainly not over.

At DAV, we are in the business of not giving up the fight for veterans. We want every man and woman who served to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity. That is a mission we live day and day out. We will not leave our brothers or sisters behind.

Army National Guard veteran Dr. Kenneth Lee serves as Chief of the Spinal Cord Injury Division at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center. He always encouraged his patients in their oftentimes difficult recovery, but for a long time the Iraq veteran was in denial of his own invisible wounds.

In Iraq, Dr. Lee was overseeing medical treatment clinics and aiding Marines wounded during the Fallujah offensive. But his mission changed instantly after he was struck by a suicide car bomber.

Dr. Lee suffered an open head traumatic brain injury, numerous shrapnel wounds to his legs, severe nerve injuries and the onset of post-traumatic stress. He begged to return to his unit after the bombing, but the severity of his injuries cut his deployment short.

Dr. Lee returned home, and the effects of the war came with him. For two years, his wife and children struggled to adjust after his return stateside. Frustration from the brain injury and a denial of post-traumatic stress came to a head when, one day, Dr. Lee's young daughter looked at him and said, "Daddy, you don't smile anymore."

At that moment, Dr. Lee realized he needed help. He enrolled in treatment and jumped headlong into adaptive sports, an arena he knew well as a volunteer physician for the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, co-hosted by DAV and VA.

It was not an easy journey to overcome, but with the support of his family, fellow veterans and service organizations, Dr. Lee continues to thrive 13 years after his Alive Day. His resiliency and commitment to giving back is why he was named DAV's 2017 Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year.

While Dr. Lee and thousands of other brave men and women have returned from war, there are still service members in harm's way around the world. I would ask you to please pause for a moment to think of those currently standing watch across the globe.

<PAUSE>

When these men and women return home, or a service member hangs up their uniform one final time, the call to serve does not abruptly end.

Just like Dr. Lee who volunteers countless hours supporting his fellow veterans annually, former service members oftentimes feel compelled to continue to serve their country and its citizens.

This is evidenced by the tragedy that occurred last month in Las Vegas, Nevada. Among the terrible carnage were stories of bravery and selflessness in the face of danger and mortality. Several of those credited with shielding and aiding their fellow concertgoers were, in fact, veterans.

One of those people was Taylor Winston. Amidst the chaos and gunfire, the DAV life member jumped into action and found a vehicle to transport more than 20 wounded concertgoers to an area hospital. Assessing and triaging victims—working to save lives—was a gut reaction for the Marine Corps veteran.

Over time, every enlistment or commission comes to an end, but a veterans' service has no expiration date. We should be grateful not only for their time in the military, but for all they do to continue to give back to their country and its citizens long after their discharge is signed.

Vocalizing our gratitude to veterans is a good start, but illustrating our thanks is most impactful with actions.

There are numerous volunteer opportunities across the country through DAV.

In some areas, you can ensure veterans can get to their medical appointments by serving as a volunteer driver for the DAV Transportation Network. Like all medical facilities, VA hospitals, nursing homes and clinics need volunteers to perform a wide range of duties. Some work directly with patients, participating in recreational programs and other activities on the wards. Others assist the VA's professional staff or escort patients, serve coffee or simply provide companionship to veteran patients.

If you do not live near a VA facility, there are still many ways to give back. Through the Local Veterans Assistance Program, volunteers can go grocery shopping or run errands for veterans in their community, do yard work or paint a veteran's home—there's a need you can help fulfill.

For my fellow veterans, you have the ability to connect with a veteran in a way that is unique to those of us who wore the uniform by joining organizations like DAV and getting involved. I encourage you to seek out your brothers and sisters in arms, get to know them and ensure they know you've got their six.

And so does DAV.

DAV exists solely to help veterans achieve a more fulfilling life by helping them attain their earned benefits and health care, find employment and provide volunteer opportunities through which they can give or receive assistance.

Please feel free to visit our website at [DAV.org](http://DAV.org) to find out more about what we do for veterans and ways you can help, or give your local DAV chapter or department a call.

Thank you for taking the time to remember our heroes. They never gave up on us, and we can't give up on them.

God bless you all, bless our veterans and bless the United States of America.

<END>