



Remarks for National Guest Department Conventions 2021

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

Opening Remarks

It's a privilege and honor to be here today as your national guest, and I thank you for the opportunity. I am incredibly proud to represent National Commander Whitehead and National Adjutant Burgess, who extend their heartfelt gratitude to all of you.

I would say we are living in unprecedented times, but we are now over a year into the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the things we could not have imagined at the start of 2020 now seem almost normal in 2021.

Over the past year, DAV leaders at all levels made difficult decisions about the work we do and the events we had planned. Together, we worked to adapt and overcome in the face of challenges we never expected.

As our organization marked its 100th anniversary in 2020, our planned celebrations were put on hold. But the gravity of the pandemic and the disruption it caused gave us an important opportunity to reflect on our organization's history and the lessons we have learned in the face of adversity.

DAV was formed in 1920 on the heels of World War I and as the influenza pandemic of 1918 drew to its end. There are many similarities to be found in the world we're living in today—a viral outbreak across the globe, overburdened health care systems, economic uncertainty, high unemployment and, underlying it all, a pressing need to address critical issues impacting our nation's wartime disabled veterans.

But from those difficult times to the present day, DAV has been the leading veteran service organization dedicated to empowering veterans and their families as they make the transition from military service to civilian life.

A lot has changed in our country and in DAV over the last century, but our commitment to those we serve has never wavered.

Improvements in battlefield medicine continue to save lives that would have been lost in previous wars. However, with veterans surviving combat-related injuries at a higher rate it thrusts a significant responsibility onto our nation to provide support, services and benefits to wounded veterans when they come home.

When a young man or woman answers the call to serve, they are making a commitment—to our great nation, themselves, their branch of service and those they stand shoulder to shoulder with while in uniform.

In return, America makes a commitment to all individuals who wore our country's uniform: If, in the course of defending our ideals, they pay the ultimate sacrifice or are forever changed, we promise we will afford them or their survivors the opportunity to enjoy the American way of life they made possible.

Just as our founders persevered through adversity, DAV has continuously provided veterans and their families with the services they required.

In the past year, though DAV offices were closed to the public out of an abundance of caution, our dedicated staff and employees continued to work diligently to help our veterans fight for the benefits they've earned in service to our nation.

Our service officers looked for new and innovative ways to continue serving veterans, including the establishment of a new toll-free hotline to better communicate with claimants. We are proud to have fielded close to 200,000 calls.

Early in the pandemic, DAV established the COVID-19 Unemployment Relief Fund to help service-connected veterans and their families weather the storm caused by financial hardships. Veterans are certainly not immune to the financial hardships rattling our nation. In countless cases, veterans have lost jobs, had their hours cut, or otherwise lost wages.

The COVID-19 Unemployment Relief Fund has helped veterans economically impacted. So far, we have distributed more than 2-million-dollars to our fellow veterans during their time of economic uncertainty.

As we watched unemployment numbers soar last year, we knew just how important quality employment opportunities would be. While hundreds of thousands of veterans were without work, DAV transformed all of our in-person career fairs to virtual events to help them stay connected with employers while remaining safely at home.

Our network of DAV volunteers also faced extreme challenges this past year, as many of the outlets through which they operated were temporarily halted. But we have watched DAV volunteers across the nation begin to come back online to provide services to the veterans who so desperately need them.

Despite COVID-related challenges, our volunteers still logged almost 10 million miles and provided veterans nearly a quarter-million rides to VA hospitals last year.

And as the virtual world became, in some ways, our only world following the COVID outbreak, DAV was able to continue our advocacy mission in Washington and throughout the country, engaging in the fight to protect veterans' legislative interests.

Undoubtedly, we will be experiencing the impact of this pandemic for years to come and must be prepared to address the long-term ramifications, but it has been remarkable to see the spirit of DAV truly come alive and to watch so many of you show the world what makes this organization so great.

We are veterans serving veterans—and nothing can stop us from accomplishing our mission.

I'm proud of all of us for standing strong in the face of adversity. We would have never gotten this far without all the great members in the Department of _____ **[state]**.

Your hard work and dedication to veterans in this state is evident, and I thank you for your tremendous efforts.

Caring for our nation's heroes is everyone's responsibility. With your continued resolve, we can continue the great push we've made to ensure our promises are kept in the century ahead.

Everyone here takes our organization's mission of service to veterans and their families seriously. It really feels like family when we gather together. We are a strong, unified organization and if you're here with us today, there's no doubt you are passionate about our organization and our nation's heroes.

You **are** DAV! You are the face of this organization to veterans and your community. Your service and leadership is a sign of the great things DAV can do. Your dedication to your fellow veterans makes our mission possible.

It may be decades since you left the military, or maybe just a few weeks. But no matter how long ago you hung the uniform up, you recognize that your battle buddies still need you in the fight as we press to ensure your fellow veterans receive the benefits and medical care they have earned and deserve.

[Specific points related to the department the speaker wishes to address go here. Consider ways the department persevered through the pandemic.]

Closing Remarks

DAV has 240 professionally trained national service officers and 26 transition service officers. That's alongside nearly 3,000 chapter and department service officers who are on the front lines serving veterans and their families every day.

Commented [MD1]: Actual number is 2,913

These benefits experts are the ones who provide direct assistance to our injured and ill veterans.

To those we serve, our service officers are DAV. And in many cases, they are the ones who help change their lives for the better.

I'd like all our national service officers, transition service officers, and department and chapter service officers to please stand to be recognized for your tremendous work.

Commented [MD2]: Take this out if it's not an in-person event.

<LEAD APPLAUSE >

You and I know that there is life after an injury or illness incurred while in service. Life is not the same as before. But, as we all know, when we surround ourselves with our fellow veterans, life starts to look a little brighter. Once we learn to accept our "new normal," we can challenge ourselves to build upon our successes. As we do, we can reach back and help our fellow veterans who are working their way toward a brighter life.

Our experiences during and after service strengthen the bonds we share with our veterans and our community. DAV is a family—one that I'm proud to be a part of.

I want to thank our counterparts in the Auxiliary, who serve with us and are a critical part of our mission. We have no better allies who understand service and sacrifice on a level that is unique and noteworthy.

Through their unmatched, dedicated service to local community veterans, National Commander Diane Franz, National Adjutant Pat Kemper and the rest of our friends and allies in the Auxiliary continued their national caregiver initiative to assist with funding caregiver and companion activities for DAV events. The Auxiliary truly is a blessing to DAV.

We've accomplished much this past year, but there's more to be done. I know we're all going to see great things from the Department of _____ **[state]**.

It is in the best interests of every veteran, caregiver, and his or her family to have a united and strong DAV. That's why we exist. I'm honored to share the bonds of fellowship and friendship with you.

Thank you for all you do to serve the veteran community here in _____ **[state]** and for your hospitality.

Thank you. May God bless the men and women standing watch today, our veterans and their families. May we be fortunate to celebrate another hundred years of DAV, and may God continue to bless the United States of America.