



Remarks for National Guest Department Conventions 2022

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

Opening Remarks

Everyone in this room is important to our mission. So if I left someone out, I hope you'll forgive me.

<PAUSE>

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 Marshall and National Adjutant Burgess, who extend their heartfelt gratitude to all of you.

<PAUSE>

As an organization, we take a bold stand: We will keep our promise to America's veterans.

That statement reinforces our mission statement that we are dedicated to a single purpose: **empowering veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity.**

We promise empowerment. We promise to be a voice on Capitol Hill. We promise to educate the public about veterans' sacrifices and needs.

It's not a promise with an **asterisk**. It doesn't come with a **caveat**. We don't say we're only going to do these things when it's *convenient*. Or when it's *comfortable*. Or when it's *popular*.

No.

"Keeping our Promise to America's Veterans" speaks to our history as much as it foretells our future.

Ours is a promise that's enduring. It's backed by action and achievement.

Our promise is a proclamation that we can look to when global events out of our control have made the easy hard and the hard nearly impossible.

For us, the promise is a **guide star** to follow, pointing us in the direction we should go: toward innovative solutions, new opportunities, and continued outreach to veterans and their families.

What are we if we go back on our promise? What does it say about us if we let adversity and challenge derail our efforts? Failure is not an option.

DAV is now two years into its second century of service to veterans. The pandemic isn't the first challenge we've faced, and it's not going to be the last.

And as weary as we may be about hearing the terms "COVID" and "pandemic," I'm here to tell you we're better and stronger as an organization because of the experience.

Allow me to share some of the highlights:

Just this year, we acquired Patriot Boot Camp—a nonprofit organization that helps people in both the

veteran and military communities with training and resources to empower them to become business founders and employers. Now known as DAV Patriot Boot Camp, the program is yet another way DAV will evolve and serve as an indispensable resource for the veteran and military connected community. And that includes the spouses who share in the sacrifices of those who've served. It's the first-ever acquisition by DAV in our 100-plus-year history. No money was exchanged, but this acquisition allows both DAV and Patriot Boot Camp to expand and grow in scope and efficiency. Military members, veterans and their spouses benefit.

Students who have volunteered with DAV now have more opportunities, too. We expanded our scholarship program, now offering 10 scholarship awards totaling "one hundred ten thousand dollars" each year. The top scholarship we give is now 30 thousand dollars. "DAV Scholarships dot org" has all the details. Students with at least 100 lifetime volunteer hours with DAV can apply. Please pass the word! We've got money we'd like to give away!

And to ALL our volunteers, on behalf of Commander Marshall and Adjutant Burgess, I want to take a minute to give you my deepest gratitude for what you do. Whether you've driven veterans to appointments, spent time in VA hospitals or helped veterans right in your community, you've made a difference. YOU are the face—and heart—of DAV to so many people in our communities. To emerge from this pandemic with the dedication and intensity you've shown is truly inspiring.

In 2021, volunteer drivers drove more than 7.9 million miles, taking nearly 164,000 veterans to their appointments.

Also in 2021, DAV volunteers totaled nearly 1 million hours working in our communities and VA hospitals.

As incredible as these numbers are, especially considering the circumstances, there's more work to be done. We will continue to honor the promise we've made to veterans. So whether you have an hour or can volunteer full time, consider donating your most precious resource—your time. “Volunteer for Veterans dot org” has more details on how you can help.

Volunteering isn't the only way DAV has helped veterans in 2021. While the pandemic was top of mind for many, others veterans also experienced the tragedy of natural disaster. We answered their call for help. Through our Disaster Relief Program, we've distributed nearly 1.4 million dollars to more than 2,100 veterans affected by natural disasters, including hurricanes, tornados, floods and fire throughout 22 states.

And finally, we have worked hard to help those who help our organization grow. This past year, we modernized and expanded our membership system by launching "my DAV dot org." This new system gives our members and member leaders more capabilities than the legacy system.

And we relaunched our Recruit A Warrior program. This personalized link streamlines and incentivizes recruiting new members. It quickly populates your information, making the process quicker. Also, you ensure you get recruitment credit *and* DAV points to use in our store.

As I said a few minutes ago, we are a stronger organization coming out of this pandemic. And the credit goes to you, our members, and the commitment you've made to helping veterans and their families.

As part of the Department of [STATE] you've been busy ...

[Specific points related to the department the speaker wishes to address go here.]

Your hard work and dedication to veterans in [STATE] is evident, and I thank you for your tremendous efforts.

Closing Remarks

In closing, there are a couple of other groups I want to thank and highlight.

DAV has 239 professionally trained national service officers and 26 transition service officers. That's alongside 2,174 chapter and department service officers who are on the front lines serving veterans and their families every day.

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

In 2021, DAV's service program took over 2.1 million actions to advocate for veterans and their families. And with DAV's assistance, service members, veterans and their families received more than 25 billion dollars in earned benefits.

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.

<LEAD APPLAUSE >

You are the cornerstone of our mission of service. Many times, someone's first contact with DAV is when they meet one of you, and as many of you can personally attest, they come to us not knowing where else to turn. Thank you sincerely for what you do.

I also want to thank our counterparts in the Auxiliary, who serve alongside 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 Lynn Helms Prosser, National Adjutant Bunny Clos, 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.

There may be no higher calling than to serve our veteran brothers and sisters and their families. I feel honored and privileged to stand with you as a part of the DAV family. And I am honored to be able to work alongside you as we continue to keep our promise to America's veterans.

Again, thank you for all you do to serve the veteran community here in [STATE] and for your hospitality.

May God bless the men and women standing watch today, our veterans and their families. May God bless DAV. And may God continue to bless the United States of America.

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Benefits Advocacy

- In 2021, DAV submitted more than 150,000 new benefits claims on behalf of veterans and their families. Of those, more than 144,000 were submitted electronically.
- With the assistance of DAV, service members, veterans and their families received over \$25 billion in earned benefits.
- We currently hold 1.1 million Power of Attorneys (POA)—claimants who have selected DAV as their authorized representative.
- Since receiving a Congressional Charter in 1932, DAV has submitted more than 12 million benefits claims.
- DAV currently provides representation for nearly 160,000 pending claims
- In 2021, DAV took over 2.1 million actions to advocate for veterans and their families, including claims representation in benefits hearings and appeals, reviewing records and offering professional advice.

Service Officers

- DAV has 245 trained national service officers and 26 transition service officers at over 100 national service and transition service offices nationwide.
- DAV national service officers provide direct assistance to ill and injured veterans and their families free of charge.
- Over 2,100 department and chapter service officers bolster service corps to ensure our fellow veterans receive the highest-quality of representation possible.
- DAV interviewed over 290,000 claimants in 2021. Interviews were conducted by national service and transition service officers in person, over the phone or virtually.

Disaster Relief

- DAV provided nearly \$1.4 million to more than 2,100 veterans impacted by natural disasters and fires in 22 states.
- DAV provides kits that include backpacks, blankets and hygiene products to disaster-stricken veterans.
- Since its inception in 1968, DAV has provided over \$17.5 million in relief funds.

Toxic Exposures

- DAV is committed to ensuring veterans of all eras who were exposed to toxic substances receive full and timely benefits for conditions caused by burn pits, Agent Orange and other known exposures.
- DAV is currently advocating for legislation—including the Honoring Our PACT Act—that would provide health care, add new presumptive diseases, create a framework for establishing presumptive diseases in the future, and expand covered locations.
- The PACT Act passed the House in early March, but we must continue to press the Senate for passage.

Caregivers

- VA began the expansion the Program of Comprehensive Assistance to Family Caregivers (PCAFC) to seriously disabled veterans from Vietnam and prior in 2020, and also introduced new—more stringent—eligibility criteria.
- The process has resulted in an 85% denial rate for new applicants, as well as reductions or removals for those veterans and caregivers already in the program.
- DAV supported VA's announced in March they will not remove anyone from the caregiver program or decrease any support before they re-examine the current eligibility criteria.
- VA must develop and implement new caregivers program eligibility criteria and reevaluation requirements that focus on getting veterans and caregivers into the program, not out of it.
- DAV was also pleased to hear confirmation that VA is committed to completing the caregiver expansion to disabled veterans of all eras in October and we look forward to engaging with the VA Secretary to ensure this invaluable program is operating in the best interest of veterans and their caregivers.

Asset and Infrastructure Review

- VA has released its preliminary report with recommendations for possible remodel, new construction, moves, closures, or changes in services throughout its facilities nationwide.
- This process is still in its initial stages, and DAV is monitoring it closely.
- It's important to remember—even if changes have been recommended for your local facility—there will be no immediate changes.
- The process must result in veterans having enhanced access to care.
- We need our membership to stay engaged and informed.

Women and Minority Veterans

- Women are the fastest-growing demographic of the veteran community, projected to reach 12% of the nationwide veteran population by 2025.
- Additionally, though the total veteran population is projected to decrease from 18.6 million in 2016 to 12.9 million in 2040, the percentage of minority veterans is expected to rise from 23% to 34% over that same period.
- VA's own systematic review found it has not been completely successful in eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in veterans' health outcomes and VA research also shows lower health care provider trust among minority veterans.
- DAV supports and is actively working toward the elimination of health disparities among woman and minority veterans, and have testified at several hearings over the past year alone to advance equity in these areas.

Employment and Entrepreneurism

- DAV and Recruit Military pivoted to all virtual career fairs at the beginning of the pandemic to continue serving veterans seeking jobs, but we are pleased to offer a full lineup of more than 80 virtual and in-person events this year.

- DAV co-hosted more than 115 virtual career fairs from March 2020 to May 2021, resulting in over 5,000 job offers.
- Statistics are showing job offers are on the rise at our career fairs, with more than 2,000 offers since returning to in-person events.
- Recognizing employers in your community is a way to encourage hiring. You can nominate or encourage a company to apply for consideration through DAV's Patriot Employer Program. Employers who can demonstrate a commitment to hiring, retaining and supporting veterans in their community can be recognized with a digital badge and considered for DAV Employer of the Year recognition. Visit patriotemployer.org for more information and encourage others to participate.
- This year, DAV acquired Patriot Boot Camp, a non-profit organization that connects entrepreneurs in the veteran and military community—including spouses—with resources and programs to help them succeed.
- It empowers participants to become business founders and employers.
- Through intensive in-person events, digital engagements, and resources DAV Patriot Boot Camp helps founders launch, scale and sustain businesses.
- We plan on hosting our very first event—an alumni event for those who have gone through the program—from July 14-16 at the new national headquarters in Erlanger. A second event is being planned for October. Visit patriotbootcamp.org and sign up for the program's newsletter to be added to future communications on programs and opportunities.

Membership

- DAV membership has many advantages, but one of the newest perks is already helping save members money on a multitude of travel, dining and service experiences.
- Among the rotating lineup of Member Advantages, deals have included discounts with Disneyland Resort, SeaWorld Parks, Universal Studios Hollywood, Shipt, ACE Hardware, Total Wireless, Shell, Subway, Domino's, Apple, and Sonic.
- DAV members have already collectively saved hundreds of thousands of dollars through Member Advantages, and it's another recruiting tool for you to use.
- Sign up at dav.enjoymydeals.com for deals on well-known national and local brands.

Volunteerism

- The DAV Scholarship Program has increased the total annual award money offered to \$110,000, and we are encouraging every member to spread the word to youth in their local communities.
- The scholarship deadline is in February each year, but the summer months are a great time for students to begin logging volunteer hours for next year's application cycle.
- We also want to hear directly from you about your high-performing volunteers. If you have a great volunteer story in your community you'd like to share, we want to hear about it! Please let us know by sending us a note to VoluntaryServicesDept@dav.org.
- And of course, to learn more about volunteer opportunities, check out volunteerforveterans.org.