



## Remarks for National Guest Department Conventions 2025

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

It's wonderful to see so many passionate leaders gathered here at the 2025 Department of [STATE] Convention. Your commitment to our mission sets the tone for what DAV represents nationwide: an unwavering dedication to improving the lives of veterans and their families, survivors and caregivers. Thank you for your leadership and the example you set every day.

I bring greetings from National Commander Daniel Contreras and National Adjutant Barry Jesinoski. They send their heartfelt thanks for your continued efforts to uphold DAV's mission of service and advocacy. Your hard work and collaboration amplify the impact of our programs and initiatives.

At DAV, we don't just talk about supporting veterans—we lead through action. Our guiding principles—service, integrity and accountability—serve as our compass. These aren't just lofty ideals; they're commitments we live by, ensuring we never waver in fulfilling the promises made to America's veterans.

They're commitments we must continue to live by. This past year has tested us in many ways—and make no mistake—we will continue to be tested going forward. No matter how difficult it may get, we cannot compromise our values. We must continue to demonstrate resilience and purpose, because our mission is sacred. Our fellow veterans are depending on us.

We've overcome challenges by staying true to our guiding principles, leaning on one another and adapting to meet new demands. The results speak volumes about who we are at our core as a community and what we can achieve when we work together.

Before I share a few highlights from the past year, I do have one appeal of critical importance to make.

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For the first time in nearly 40 years, DAV membership has slipped below 1 million members.

The landscape is challenging, no doubt, but one of our most pressing priorities in 2025 is membership growth.

A united, robust membership strengthens our legislative efforts, as demonstrated by the PACT Act. Thanks to this law, the VA has already granted over 1 million PACT Act claims this year alone. This incredible impact is only possible because of the strength and unity of our membership. It's just one example of many.

When we don't prioritize membership recruitment, it's akin to leaving our buddies behind on the battlefield—something not a single one of us would have ever considered.

The fact is, less members means less influence. We've earned a seat at the table, but we have to keep it. When a million—or more—voices are raised in unison, lawmakers listen. That's how lives are changed and saved.

Each one of us has a responsibility to bring in new members. So let's work together to bring them in, ensure their voices are heard and continue driving transformative change for veterans. New members bring fresh energy, ideas and momentum to our mission. Without them, our ability to advocate for veterans and deliver services would be at risk.

Talk to your communities about why DAV matters. Show them how joining us means taking an active role in ensuring veterans receive the care and support they deserve. Use the tools and resources on [MyDAV.org](https://MyDAV.org) to help spread this message and engage new members.

Remember, recruitment isn't just about numbers—it's about fostering community and securing the future of DAV. Let's work together to bring more people into the fold and continue building on our strong foundation.

And our foundation is strong. Here are just a few highlights of what we've accomplished together.

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Knowing that there are more than 5.5 million caretakers providing critical assistance to veterans in need, we launched DAV Caregivers Support in 2023. Last year, this became a formal program at DAV specifically focused on caretakers.

This team will be tasked with developing and deploying best-in-class, evidence-based programs and resources to empower caregivers.

Whether through our own program or through other resources, we're dedicated to making it easier for caregivers to navigate the challenges they face.

This program is a testament to what DAV does best: identifying needs, creating solutions and delivering meaningful results. Spread the word about this resource. Together, we can connect even more families with the support they deserve. Like all of DAV's services, it's offered at no cost to veterans who are caregivers and the caregivers of veterans. We all know someone who needs this type of help, so please refer [DAVcaregivers.org](https://davicaregivers.org) to the people you know who need it.

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Caregiver support isn't the only way we provide resources to those who give freely of their time to better the lives of veterans.

DAV's scholarship program has done a great job incentivizing volunteer participation, with 10 awards totaling \$110,000 annually. These scholarships recognize students who have dedicated time to supporting veterans through volunteer work. The top award of \$30,000 underscores our commitment to investing in young leaders who exemplify the spirit of service.

If you know a young person who aspires to have a postsecondary education, they probably also have requirements to demonstrate community service. Please encourage students in your communities to apply at [DAVscholarships.org](https://DAVscholarships.org). By supporting these future leaders, we inspire others to follow their example and strengthen our mission.

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Of course, volunteers come in all ages, and the numbers DAV volunteers accumulated in 2024 tell an incredible story. Our volunteer drivers covered over 9.3 million miles while transporting more than 235 thousand veterans to lifesaving medical appointments. Meanwhile, volunteers contributed over 3.5 million hours in VA facilities and communities nationwide.

But numbers only tell part of the story. The real impact lies in the lives changed by those who dedicate their time and energy to serving veterans.



Last year, we launched our first-ever DAV Community Impact Day, an annual event where DAV member leaders, volunteers and supporters come together to engage in service projects and community outreach to directly support veterans and their families. In 2024, the event was a tremendous success, with volunteers participating in a variety of initiatives that provided critical services and resources to veterans, including home repairs, job training and wellness checks. The day fostered a strong sense of camaraderie and showcased the organization's commitment to improving the lives of those who have served.

But it wasn't just a one-day effort. Throughout the course of the year, volunteers in our LVAP program logged over 2.3 million hours.

Whether it's an hour or a lifetime, every moment matters. Visit [VolunteerForVeterans.org](https://VolunteerForVeterans.org) to explore how you can get involved and help us grow this vital effort.

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In 2024, natural disasters devastated communities across the country. DAV's Disaster Relief Program stepped in, distributing nearly \$1.5 million to more than 2,200 veterans in 24 states. From hurricanes to wildfires, our swift response ensured that veterans and their families received the support they needed when, in many cases, they lost everything.

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DAV's advocacy program achieved extraordinary outcomes last year. Our team took over 3.1 million actions to help veterans and their families access earned benefits, resulting in over \$30.4 billion in earned compensation. These efforts reflect the dedication of our national service officers, transition service officers, and countless department and chapter service officers.

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In every corner of DAV, integrity and communication are the pillars that uphold our work. They guide us in making decisions, navigating challenges and staying true to our mission. These principles ensure that we operate with transparency and hold ourselves accountable to the highest standards.

As leaders, we must exemplify these values in everything we do. That means fostering open dialogue, building trust within our teams and always putting veterans first. Our collective success depends on our ability to work together and uphold the promises we've made to those we serve.

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The work you do here in [STATE] is nothing short of inspiring. Your dedication, passion and perseverance are the driving forces behind DAV's success. Thank you for your leadership and for everything you do to make a difference in the lives of veterans and their families.

Let's continue to lead with integrity, communicate with purpose and recruit with intention. Together, we can ensure that DAV remains a trusted ally for America's veterans, now and in the future.

Thank you, and let's make 2025 a year of extraordinary impact.

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