



2026 Mid-Winter Conference Prep

Critical Policy Goals

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LEGISLATIVE DEPARTMENT

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DAV 2026 Critical Policy Goals

1. *Make the claims and appeals process work better for veterans.*
2. Strengthen presumptive policies to ensure toxic-exposed veterans receive earned benefits in a timely manner.
3. Eliminate gaps in veterans mental health care and suicide prevention.
4. Modernize and strengthen benefits for survivors of disabled veterans.
5. Prevent Congress or VA from reducing, offsetting or taxing veterans benefits.
6. Expand comprehensive dental care services to all service-disabled veterans.
7. Enhance long-term care by providing assisted living and increasing caregiver support.
8. Sustain the VA health care system by reforming infrastructure planning and funding mechanisms.
9. Protect veterans benefits and services by ending PAYGO offsets and budget caps that cut funding.

Make the claims and appeals process work better for veterans.

- VA claims and appeals process remains overly complex
- Reforms improved efficiency, but barriers persist for veterans
- Veterans deserve a simple, fair, and accessible system
- VA should:
 - ▶ Allow claims by phone
 - ▶ Eliminate penalties for incorrect forms
 - ▶ Improve decision letters
 - ▶ Reform disability exams

Strengthen presumptive policies to ensure toxic-exposed veterans receive earned benefits in a timely manner.

- Service members have faced toxic exposures for over a century
- The PACT Act expanded care and benefits for millions of veterans
- Gaps remain: limited accountability and incomplete coverage of exposures
- VA takes an average of 34.1 years to grant toxic exposure presumptions
- VA must establish a faster, more accountable presumptive process

Eliminate gaps in veterans mental health care and suicide prevention.

- Veteran suicide rates remain higher than the general population
- Gaps persist in mental health access, coordination, and effectiveness
- Current approaches have not sufficiently reduced suicide risk
- Women veterans and other underserved groups face disproportionate risk
- DAV's 2024 Women Veterans report outlines gaps and 50+ recommendations to improve care and reduce suicide rates

Prevent Congress or VA from reducing, offsetting or taxing veterans benefits.

- Over 5.6 million disabled veterans receive VA disability compensation
- Many face offsets that reduce earned benefits:
 - ▶ Medical retirees can't receive full retirement pay and VA compensation
 - ▶ Longevity retirees rated 40% or less are prohibited from concurrent receipt
 - ▶ Veterans must repay special separation pay to receive VA compensation
- These offsets unjustly reduce or tax veterans' benefits
- Congress must end these offsets and protect veterans' earned compensation

Modernize and strengthen benefits for survivors

- DIC provides tax-free monthly benefits to survivors of service-connected deaths
- In 2026, surviving spouses receive \$1,699/month
- DIC equals about 41% of 100% VA disability compensation
- This is lower than the 55% survivor benefit for federal civil service retirees
- Gaps in eligibility:
 - ▶ No DIC if veteran was totally disabled for less than 10 years
 - ▶ Benefits lost if survivor remarries before age 55
- Survivor benefits need reform

Expand comprehensive dental care services to all service-disabled veterans.

- A generally limits full dental care to:
 - ▶ 100% service-disabled veterans
 - ▶ Veterans with service-connected dental conditions
- Poor dental health increases risk of serious and chronic health conditions
- VA health care is intended to be comprehensive and preventive
- Dental care is essential to whole-health treatment
- Congress should expand dental coverage to all disabled veterans

Enhance long-term care by providing assisted living and increasing caregiver support.

- VA long-term care programs leave gaps for veterans who can't live independently but don't need nursing home care
- Caregivers save taxpayers and improve veterans' quality of life
- Assisted living can fill the care gap with support for daily activities
- These options help veterans remain at home longer and avoid nursing homes
- Congress should:
 - ▶ Require VA to offer assisted living options for disabled veterans
 - ▶ Integrate caregiver support with home- and community-based services

Sustain the VA health care system by reforming infrastructure planning and funding mechanisms.

- VA operates the nation's largest integrated health care system
- Over 1,750 access points and 5,600 buildings, many more than 50 years old
- Aging facilities force veterans into community care and strain the system
- Insufficient infrastructure funding threatens long-term VA viability
- Congress must reform and fully fund VA facility modernization

Protect veterans benefits and services by ending PAYGO offsets and budget caps that cut funding.

- Budget rules like PAYGO make expanding veterans benefits more difficult
- PAYGO and budget caps force cuts to existing VA programs
- These rules arbitrarily constrain VA funding
- Veterans are effectively forced to “pay” for their own benefit increases
- Congress should exempt veterans programs from PAYGO and budget caps
- Ending PAYGO ensures all Americans share the cost of caring for veterans

2026 Mid-Winter Conference

DAV Veterans Events

[VIEW CALENDAR](#)

2026 Mid-Winter Conference

February 22 – February 25, 2026

Arlington, VA

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

2026 Mid-Winter Conference



February 22 – February 25, 2026

Crystal Gateway Marriott

1700 Richmond Highway

Arlington, VA 22202

Phone: 1-800-393-3680 or 703-920-3230

Group Name: Disabled American Veterans

[Crystal Gateway Marriott Room Reservations](#)

The 2026 DAV Midwinter room block at the Crystal Gateway Marriott at the DAV negotiated rate of \$219.00 is now closed. Future reservations at the Crystal Gateway Marriott will be at the hotel's prevailing rate. Please click [here](#) to see a list of additional nearby hotels.

2026 Mid-Winter Agenda

DAV 2026 National Mid-Winter Conference
Crystal Gateway Marriott, Arlington, VA
February 22 - 25, 2026 (normal travel days February 21 & 25 after 1pm)
As of 2/2/2026 subject to change

Schedule of Events

Saturday, 2/21/26

	<u>Room</u>	<u>Time</u>
Registration	Arlington Registration Desk	9am- 4pm
DAV HQ Office	Alexandria Room	11am- 4pm

Sunday, 2/22/26

DAV HQ Office	Alexandria Room	9am- 4pm
Registration	Arlington Registration Desk	7am- 1pm
Business Session	Salons 3-4	9am- 11:30am
Benefits Protection/Legislative Workshop	Salons 3-4	1pm- 3pm
Membership Workshop	Salons 3-4	3:15pm- 4:15pm

Monday, 2/23/26

DAV HQ Office	Alexandria Room	8am- 4pm
Service Workshop	Salons 3-4	9am-10:15am
Voluntary Services Workshop	Salons 3-4	10:30am-11:30am
Inspector General Workshop	Salons 3-4	12:45pm-1:45pm
Caregiver Workshop	Salons 3-4	2pm- 2:45pm
Communications & Outreach Workshop	Salons 3-4	3pm- 3:45pm
Entrepreneurship and Employment Workshop	Salons 3-4	4pm- 4:45pm

Tuesday, 2/24/26

DAV HQ Office	Alexandria Room	8am- 4pm
*National Commander Presentation to Joint House & Senate Veterans Affairs Committee	Dirksen Senate Bldg. Room SD-650, Capitol Hill Washington, DC 20215	10am
DAV National Service Foundation	Salons 5-6	2:00pm
DAV Charitable Service Trust	Salons 5-6	Immediately following NSF
Disabled Veterans Life Memorial Foundation	Salons 5-6	Immediately following CST
National Commanders Reception	Salons 3-4	6:30pm- 8:30pm

Wednesday, 2/25/26

DAV National Board of Directors	Salon 4	9am
DAV National Executive Committee	Salon 4	Immediately following BOD Meeting

**This meeting will be held on Capitol Hill*

Presentation of DAV's Legislative Program

Tuesday, February 24th

10:00 a.m.

Dirksen Senate Office Building

Room G50



Coleman Nee
National Commander

GUIDELINES FOR A SUCCESSFUL CONGRESSIONAL MEETING



SCHEDULE THE MEETING

- Call, email or write your legislator's office to schedule the meeting.
- Generally, you will be asked about what specific issues you would like to discuss.
- Provide talking points for DAV's legislative priorities.

PREPARING FOR THE MEETING

- Meetings usually last 15 to 25 minutes, depending on the member's schedule.
- Plan to discuss no more than three or four issues.
- If you are attending the meeting as a group, pick a spokesperson to lead the discussion.
- Provide talking points for DAV's legislative priorities.
- Learn everything you can about the issue(s) you plan to discuss including any potential opposition the legislator may have so you are prepared to defend your position. (On veterans' issues, the opposition usually stems from costs to pay for the program or benefit being proposed.)

AT THE MEETING

- Be punctual and arrive at least 5 minutes before the appointment time.
- Dress neatly and conservatively. Always be courteous and respectful.
- Do not be upset if you end up meeting with the legislator's staff. They are often more knowledgeable of individual issues than the legislators themselves, and they will inform the legislator of your views and requests.
- Introduce yourself and all members of your group to the legislator or staff members: tell them who

you are and where you live. After a minute or two of "small talk," state your position on the issue(s) you came to discuss.

- Be concise, factual, brief and be sure to listen carefully to responses or concerns.
- Be ready to answer questions and discuss your issue in detail. If you cannot answer the question, let them know that you will ask someone from DAV's national legislative department to follow up. Make sure you inform the DAV legislative staff of the question and the person to contact in the legislator's office.
- If the legislator does not support an issue, you can respectfully debate the topic if you feel comfortable, but do not become over-argumentative. Emphasize the positives of your standpoint, and always end the conversation on a positive note.
- Remain nonpartisan throughout the meeting.
- Thank them for meeting.

AFTER THE MEETING

- Always send a follow-up email or letter thanking your legislator or staff members. Be sure to include any additional information you may have offered to provide in support of your issue. The follow-up message is important, because it confirms your commitment to your cause and helps build a valuable relationship between you and your representative.
- Stay in touch with congressional staff throughout the year.

Schedule the Meeting

- Call, email or write your legislator's office to schedule the meeting.
- Generally, you will be asked about what specific issues you would like to discuss.
- Provide talking points, DAV's Critical Policy Goals.



Preparing for the Meeting

- Limited time.
- Discuss no more than three or four issues.
- Meeting as a group, pick a spokesperson to lead the discussion.
- Provide talking points for DAV's legislative priorities.
- Learn everything you can about the issue(s) including any potential opposition, prepared to defend your position.



After Meeting

- Make appointments with your elected officials when you return home.
- Please provide lawmakers with a copy of:
 - ▶ DAV Critical Policy Goals
 - ▶ The Independent Budget for FY 2027
 - ▶ Women Veterans: Journey to Mental Wellness
 - ▶ Ending the Wait for Toxic-Exposed Veterans
- **Congressional Meeting Feedback Forms** are online at: davcan.org (select Meeting with Congress).

Resources

■ Handouts:

- ▶ 2026 Critical Policy Goals (full/condensed versions)
- ▶ Independent Budget for FY 2027-2028
- ▶ Women Veterans: The Journey to Mental Wellness
- ▶ Ending the Wait for Toxic-Exposed Veterans
- ▶ Guidelines for a successful congressional meeting
- ▶ 2025-2026 DAV Resolution Book available online



Legislative Resources

■ PowerPoints:

- ▶ Will be posted at www.dav.org under **Events/Mid-Winter 2026**

Thank you!

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DAV Commander's Action Network (DAV CAN)



Legislative Resources