Benefits Protection Team Leader Program

- To take our advocacy efforts to a new level
- The threats are real and cannot be ignored
- We must redouble our efforts on behalf of the nation’s disabled veterans, their dependents and survivors
- New tools to assist in our federal legislative efforts—to unify and solidify DAV’s critical message across the nation
- These same tools can be used to bring about legislative change on the local and state level
Benefits Protection Team Leaders’ Duties

• The Benefits Protection Team Leader (BPTL) is responsible for coordinating and overseeing DAV’s legislative agenda, including the resolution process at the local level, and grassroots efforts.

• The BPTL is also responsible for, at the direction of the Department Commander, advocating for local issues that are not in conflict with resolutions adopted at the National level or with Department policies.

• All time spent on these activities will receive credit under LVAP.
Benefits Protection Team Leaders’ Duties

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BENEFIT PROTECTION TEAM LEADER

The Benefits Protection Team Leader (BPTL) is responsible for coordinating and overseeing DAV’s grassroots efforts, legislative agenda, and resolution process at the local level. The BPTL is also responsible for advocating for local issues that are not in conflict with resolutions adopted at the National level or with Department policies, at the direction of the Department Commander.

The BPTL should:
- Sign up for DAV CAN: www.dav.org/learn-more/legislation/join-action-network-take-action
- Distribute alerts at DAV meetings and encourage members to take action.
- Encourage others to join DAV CAN.
- Develop a local grassroots network—Benefits Protection Team Members made up of DAV members, family, and friends.
  - Build a network of networks to get the word out on issues important to injured and ill veterans, their families and survivors. (Visit www.dav.org/grassroots for information on Building a Network of Networks).
  - Get phone numbers and email addresses of chapter/unit members and contact them to ask for their commitment as a Benefits Protection Team Member.
  - Email or provide a printed copy of the Protecting Our Benefits Begins With You brochure to your Benefit Protection Team Members.
  - Email or provide a printed copy of the Protecting Our Benefits Begins With You brochure to your Benefit Protection Team Members.
  - Provide your chapter Commander and Adjutant with the contact information of your Benefit Protection Team Members.
- Support the legislative efforts of DAV and your Department.
- Be prepared to discuss DAV legislative issues and alerts at your DAV meetings.
- Disseminate legislative (national, state and local) information to Department and Chapter members.
- Coordinate a DAV presence at congressional town hall meetings to communicate DAV positions to elected officials whenever possible.
- Get to know your federal elected officials and their staff.
- Develop relationships with state legislators and state Department of Veterans Affairs officials.
- Keep informed about DAV’s position on legislation introduced by federal elected officials.
- Notify DAV legislative staff about issues we need to be aware of that affect DAV members or their families and survivors.
- Keep up with state/local issues affecting injured and ill veterans and their families.
- Notify DAV legislative staff of developing trends in local issues that affect DAV members.
- Notify DAV legislative staff of local congressional field hearings (on the federal level) and, if requested to testify, seek assistance from DAV legislative staff.
- Support protection and enhancement of state veterans’ benefits.
- Encourage members to bring forth resolutions in support of DAV’s mission.
- Help schedule and coordinate Congressional meetings for your DAV members coming to Washington, D.C. for the DAV Mid-Winter Conference. Also, encourage members who are unable to attend the Mid-Winter Conference to contact the local office of their legislators and provide them with DAV’s Talking Points during the week of the Mid-Winter Conference.
DAV’s Legislative Process & You

- Resolutions
- Legislative Process
- Advocacy Campaign
- Nonpartisan Activity
DAV Resolutions

- Mandates action by DAV and members

- **National Constitution, Art. II – Purpose:**
  - “…to advance the interests and work for the betterment of all wounded, gassed, injured and disabled veterans....”

- **National Bylaws, Art. 2, Sec. 2.1:**
  - “…participating in political issues which have a direct bearing upon the welfare of America’s disabled veterans.”

- **National Bylaws, Art. 2, Sec. 2.2, Para. 1:**
  - “No member shall appear before any legislative body or speak in the name of the Organization...propounding a position contrary to any resolution then in effect....”

- **National Bylaws, Art. 2, Sec. 2.2, Para. 2:**
  - “No federal legislation shall be sponsored or endorsed...in the name of the DAV...unless it has been approved [by the adoption of a resolution]....”

- **National Bylaws, Art. 2, Sec. 2.2, Para. 3:**
  - Exceptions: any attempt to “repeal or deprive disabled veterans or their dependents of benefits already provided by law or regulation.” Or when the National Commander, National Adjutant or National Executive Committee deems support of legislation is beneficial to disabled veterans or their families.
DAV Resolutions

Introduction:

- Individual
- Chapter Level
- Department
- National Convention
DAV Resolutions

Construction:

• Title:

• Whereas Clauses:

• Resolved Clause:
Legislative Process

- Bill introduced by Member of Congress
- DAV Mandate: Support—Oppose—Neutral
- Proactively support the introduction of a DAV Resolution
- A bill becomes a law
Grassroots Campaigns

- Decision to move forward on an issue or a bill
- Alert and sample email or action plan developed and sent out
Call to Action

- You receive an alert or action plan
- What to do next?
Get the Word Out

• Phone Calls
• Emails (BC/Blind Copy your network)
• Social Media
• DAV Meetings
Calls, Emails and Social Media
Now What?

• You got the call to action
• You got the word out
• What comes next?
Now What?

• In the majority of cases, it will only require sending an email and then following up to make sure your network took action

• In a few cases, you will need to take it to the next level
Personal Contact with Elected Officials

- Phone Calls
- Office Visits
- Attend a Congressional Town Hall and Raise the Issue
Personal Contact with Elected Officials

Guidelines for a Successful Congressional Meeting

Schedule the meeting
- Call or write your legislator’s office to schedule the meeting.
- If you know the specific issues, let the office know. If you are unsure of the issues, let them know you will discuss issues important to ill and injured veterans, their families, and survivors.

Preparing for the meeting
- Plan to discuss no more than two or three issues. Meetings usually last 15 to 35 minutes, depending on the member’s schedule.
- Learn everything you can about your issue(s).
- Learn everything you can about any opposition to your issue(s), and be ready to defend your position. (If veterans’ issues, the opposition usually stems from costs to pay for the program or benefits.)
- Bring talking points of DAV’s legislative priorities, which will be available in early February.
- If you are attending the meeting as a group, pick a spokesperson to lead the discussion.

At the meeting
- Arrive about 15 minutes before the appointment time. At least, be on time. Dress neatly and conservatively. Be courteous and respectful. Don’t be nervous.
- 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 respectful, and be sure to listen carefully.
- Be ready to answer questions and discuss your issue in detail. If you cannot answer the question, let them know that someone from the DAV National Legislative Department will be in touch with them. Make sure you inform the DAV legislative staff of the question and the person to contact to the legislator’s office.

After the meeting
- Always send a follow-up letter or fax thanking your legislator or staff members for the time they dedicated to your meeting. Also include any additional information you may have offered to provide in support of your issue. The follow-up communication 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.

After the Meeting Letter Suggestions

Always send a follow-up letter or fax thanking your legislator or staff members for the time they dedicated to your meeting. Also include any additional information you may have offered to provide in support of your issue. The follow-up communication is important, because it confirms your commitment to your cause and helps build a valuable relationship between you and your representative.

To member of Congress when you met with staff, with copy to you:

I would like to express my appreciation for the opportunity to meet with [member’s full name] while I was in [Washington, D.C. or [another name] office in [City, State]]. We discussed your staff is very busy, and we were pleased that we were able to meet and discuss issues that are important to our nation’s disabled veterans, their families, and survivors. [State brief] had a productive conversation with you about [list the key issues that you discussed, e.g., funding for veterans programs, women’s health care for veterans, other issues].

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Writing Campaigns

SAMPLE LETTER TO HOUSE AND SENATE

The Honorable [Representative/Senator]
[Address]

Dear [Representative/Senator’s Name]

I am writing to request your support of [Bill Number], the [Bill Title]. I believe this bill is important for the [specific interest or constituency].

[Explain the need for the bill and its potential benefits.]

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Contact Information]

SAMPLE EMAIL TO ELECTED OFFICIALS

Dear [Representative/Senator’s Name],

I am writing to request your support of [Bill Number], the [Bill Title]. I believe this bill is important for the [specific interest or constituency].

[Explain the need for the bill and its potential benefits.]

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Contact Information]
Social Media

- In 2013, 93% of Congress were on Twitter
- Retweet DAV messages/alerts/calls to action
- Post them on Facebook and LinkedIn
- If you blog, copy them to your site
The Media

• Letters to the Editor

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

July 29, 2012

DAV VALUABLE RESOURCE FOR DISABLED VETERANS AND THEIR DEPENDENTS

Dear Editor,

DAV means building better lives for America's disabled veterans. 1.2 million member Disabled American Veterans (DAV) is a non-profit charity dedicated to building better lives for America's disabled veterans and their families. The DAV was established in 1920 as the disabled veterans were returning home from World War I. In 1932, Congress chartered the DAV as the official voice of this nation’s wartime disabled veterans.

America has many brave military personnel leaving Iraq and Afghanistan. DAV services and advocacy are as relevant today as in anytime in U.S. history.

Annually, 200,000 veterans plus their dependents rely on claims for benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs or the Department of Defense.

Another aspect of DAV is its comprehensive network of volunteers, who drive the DAV vans, which provide veterans a free ride to and from Durham VA in Durham and McGuire VA in Richmond, VA, which meets medical appointments on time. It is amazing how the moral and the Expert’s Corps improves each individual.

Rookee Valley Chapter 15 is the North Carolina DAV in Roanoke Rapids. Contact by phone 332-305 or 307 to join us at our monthly meeting, which is held on the third Monday of each month at 7 p.m.

Vet Capt. E.M. Brittingham, U.S.N.
Rookee
The Media

SAMPLE OP-ED

THE HILL

September 30, 2014 at 2:00 p.m.

FIX THE VA FOR THE LONG RUN

By Ronald F. Hope

It might be a notable anniversary, but it’s not one to celebrate—it’s one from which we should learn. And one for which both Congress and the administration should make amends.

One year ago, on Oct. 1, 2013, the federal government shut down. For 16 days, tens of millions of Americans were left in limbo, not least our veterans. Though VA medical centers stayed open because their appropriations are approved in advance, work stopped on more than 280,000 veterans’ disability claims awaiting appeals, burials at national cemeteries were scaled back and vital medical and prosthetic needs projects were threatened. No one in their right mind wants a repeat of this dark period.

This year, thankfully, no government shutdown appears to be in the offing. But partisan gridlock and political dysfunctions are still going strong, to the detriment of our veterans. Congress’ failure to approve appropriations bills on time means that this Oct. 1—the start of fiscal year 2015—funding will be provided only through a short-term stop gap (known as a continuing resolution). This means that from now through Dec. 11—and if the past is any guide, perhaps much longer—the VA will not know how much money it has to meet its mission for the first six months of the current fiscal year, which runs through Sept. 30, 2015. Sadly, this is standard operating procedure. Continuing resolutions for the VA have been used in 23 of the past 26 fiscal years, causing huge disruptions for the department and hobbling its capacity to effectively plan and administer services for those who have risked their lives for our country.

Even worse, these annual appropriation delays are but one aspect of the political irresponsibility that has stretched the VA to the breaking point. Funding is not only unpredictable— it’s inadequate. Year after year, the White House proposes and Congress appropriates far less than the VA says it needs. As a result, over the past 10 years, the VA has received billions less than what internal projections recommended. DAV estimates nearly $8 billion less than needed. And investments in the VA’s infrastructure have averaged between $2 and $3 billion annually, even though approximately $6 billion is needed over the next 10 years.

Adding insult to injury are various gimmicks schemes up to try to paper over budgetary inadequacies. Those go by such names as “projected savings,” “efficiencies,” “collections,” “carryovers” and “contingency funds”— but while they might make the numbers on a spreadsheet look better, they don’t actually do anything to help our nation’s veterans.

Without the resources to meet the needs of those it serves, the VA is forced either to ration care to current patients, or delay or delay entry into the VA medical system to new veterans. This is unacceptable.

Americans veterans need a long-term commitment to rebuild the VA—one that is backed by real resources. That has to start with Congress, providing a funding stream that is both predictable and large enough to match the mission.

The good news is that this summer, Congress and the administration made a solid down payment of $3 billion based on the additional $17.8 billion the VA acknowledged it needs over the next three years. This investment is necessary to hire more medical staff, launch major infrastructure repairs, and lease new facilities—all essential to ensuring the VA can serve the influx of veterans needing health care services.

Now, this down payment requires follow-through in appropriating the rest of the VA’s request. After all, if our governments can pay for the wars it asks our troops to fight, it must find a way to pay—fully and honestly—for the treatment and services veterans need after they return home.

In addition, Congress should pass the bipartisan Putting Veterans Funding First Act, providing for advance appropriations of all VA operations, as is already done on the medical side. This will ensure that the VA knows its budget before the start of each fiscal year— improving management—and it will prevent cutoffs in benefit processing and payments to veterans that could occur in any future government shutdown. This bill has passed the House and Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committees. Now, congressional leaders should make it a top priority to enact this urgently needed, non-controversial legislation during the lame duck session after the election.

When it comes to our veterans, elected officials often say all the right words, but all the great sentiments in the world won’t get a wounded veteran treatment for lost limbs, spinal cord damage, post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injuries. It’s time for our political leaders to match their words to their deeds, put their money where their mouths are, and guarantee realistic budgets and timely appropriations so the VA can, at long last, meet the needs of all veterans suffering due their service and sacrifice for our nation.

Ron Hope, a combat-wounded Vietnam War veteran, is national commander of nearly 1.3 million member DAV (Disabled American Veterans).
Coalitions

• In many cases DAV belongs to a local veterans coalition, use them
• Pass our message on to other civic groups you belong to
Mid-Winter

- DC Meeting
- In-state meeting during Mid-Winter
Grasstops

- Individuals who have personal contact with Member of Congress or key staff
- Neighbors
- Family
- Friends
- Campaign Workers
- Classmate
- Golfing Buddies
- Your Commander or Adjutant
- You
Grasstops

- Identify your Grasstops

- Know what they are comfortable with
  - Personal contact
  - Phone Calls
  - Emails
  - Subject Matter

- Use them sparingly—important campaigns only
DAV MSOs

- MSOs?
Nonpartisan
Questions?
DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BENEFIT PROTECTION TEAM LEADER

The Benefits Protection Team Leader (BPTL) is responsible for coordinating and overseeing DAV’s grassroots efforts, legislative agenda, and resolution process at the local level. The BPTL is also responsible for advocating for local issues that are not in conflict with resolutions adopted at the National level or with Department policies, at the direction of the Department Commander.

The BPTL should:
• Distribute alerts at DAV meetings and encourage members to take action.
• Encourage others to join DAV CAN.
• Develop a local grassroots network—Benefits Protection Team Members made up of DAV members, family and friends.
  o Build a network of networks to get the word out on issues important to injured and ill veterans, their families and survivors. (Visit www.dav.org/grassroots for information on Building a Network of Networks)
  o Get phone numbers and email addresses of chapter/unit members and contact them to ask for their commitment as a Benefits Protection Team Member.
  o Email or provide a printed copy of the Protecting Our Benefits Begins With You brochure to your Benefit Protection Team Members.
  o Record contact information for your Benefit Protection Team Members on your Benefit Protection Team Member contact sheet.
  o Provide your chapter Commander and Adjutant with the contact information of your Benefit Protection Team Members and the DAV National Legislative Department at National Service and Legislative Headquarters in Washington, D.C.
• Support the legislative efforts of DAV and your Department.
• Be prepared to discuss DAV legislative issues and alerts at your DAV meetings.
• Disseminate legislative (national, state and local) information to Department and Chapter members.
• Coordinate a DAV presence at congressional town hall meetings to communicate DAV positions to elected officials whenever possible.
• Get to know your federal elected officials and their staff.
• Develop relationships with state legislators and state Department of Veterans Affairs officials.
• Keep informed about DAV’s position on legislation introduced by federal elected officials.
• Notify DAV legislative staff about federal issues we need to be aware of that affect DAV members or their families and survivors.
• Keep up with state/local issues affecting injured and ill veterans and their families
• Notify DAV legislative staff of developing trends in local issues that affect DAV members.
• Notify DAV legislative staff of local congressional field hearings (on the federal level) and, if requested to testify, seek assistance from DAV legislative staff.
• Support protection and enhancement of state veterans’ benefits.
• Ensure that resolutions considered by the Chapter are consistent with DAV’s stated mission in DAV Resolution No. 001.
• Encourage members to bring forth resolutions in support of DAV’s mission.
• Help schedule and coordinate Congressional meetings for your DAV members coming to Washington, D.C. for the DAV Mid-Winter Conference. Also, encourage members who are unable to attend the Mid-Winter Conference to contact the local office of their legislators and provide them with DAV’s Talking Points during the week of the Mid-Winter Conference.
Dos and Don’ts for DAV members during election-year

The long and the short of campaign season: As a private citizen and a disabled veteran you have all the rights and privileges afforded under the U.S. Constitution to all American citizens. DAV encourages you, as an individual, to register to vote, to vote in elections and to actively support the candidates of your choice. However, as a member of the DAV, you have the responsibility to ensure that your activities do not give the appearance of support for—or opposition to—any candidate by the DAV or violate our Congressional Charter (Title 36, United States Code), DAV’s national Constitution and Bylaws, or the law and regulations governing DAV’s tax exempt status (Title 26 United States Code).

Dos and Don’ts:

Do get involved in political campaigns, rallies, forums and town hall meetings, as an individual. It’s your right as an American citizen—and a disabled veteran—to support the candidate of your choice.

Don’t support a candidate, or attend political events in support of a candidate, in the name of the DAV or give the appearance that the DAV is supporting a particular candidate. Wearing DAV caps and shirts can give the appearance of support by the organization.

Do hold open candidate forums or town hall meetings so that the candidates can discuss their positions on issues affecting disabled veterans, their families and survivors.

Don’t forget to invite all candidates to the open forum/town hall meeting and make reasonable attempts to accommodate their schedules. It is not necessary that all candidates accept the invitation or attend for you to hold the event or that the candidates appear on the same day or at the same time.

Do make candidates aware of the issues facing wounded, injured and ill veterans, their families and survivors, either as an individual or as a member/leader of the DAV or its subdivision.

Don’t forget to review DAV’s National resolutions to ensure your position is in line with and not contrary to or unsupported by DAV’s adopted resolutions when speaking on behalf of the organization.

Don’t forget that, while DAV provides services to all veterans, our legislative goals focus on the betterment of wartime disabled veterans.
DAV National Policies:

- "The corporation [DAV] shall be nonpolitical and nonsectarian, and may not promote the candidacy of an individual seeking public office." Title 36, United States Code, section 50306.
- DAV National Constitution, Art. II - Purpose: "...to advance the interests and work for the betterment of all wounded, gassed, injured and disabled veterans...."
- DAV National Bylaws, Art. 2, Sec 2.1 - Nonpartisanship: The Organization shall be non-political and non-sectarian and the name of this Organization or name of any subdivision thereof shall not be used in representing the desires or wishes of its membership in any political, sectarian or labor dispute, except as provided hereinafter...the forgoing shall not prevent this Organization or any subdivision thereof from participating in political issues which have a direct bearing upon the welfare of America’s disabled veterans."
- DAV National Bylaws, Art. 2, Sec 2.2, - Legislative Activities, Para. 1: No member shall speak in the name of the DAV taking a position contrary to a standing resolution.
- DAV National Bylaws, Art. 2, Sec. 2.2, Para. 2: Federal legislation cannot be sponsored or endorsed without a resolution.
- Under the law and regulations governing the Internal Revenue Service (Title 26, Unites States Code), the federal tax-exempt status of certain charitable, nonprofit organizations, including DAV, shall be withheld or removed if they: “Participate or intervene, directly or indirectly in any political campaign on behalf or in opposition to any candidate for public office...Activities which constitute participation or intervention in a political campaign in behalf of or in opposition to a candidate include, but are not limited to, the making of oral or written statements on behalf of or in opposition to such a candidate.