



National Convention Remarks

Auxiliary National Commander Craig Johniken

July 14, 2018

Thank you, Commander Metcalf-Foster.

I'm honored to have the opportunity to speak to you today about topics that are critically important. The significance of these topics is not limited to myself as a veteran's spouse, a veteran's father, a grandfather, and a member of the DAV Auxiliary. Rather, they are essential to all veteran families.

Each and every one of us in this room share a common responsibility – to stay informed and aware of all facets of the organization and veteran-related issues so we can serve veterans and their families.

The Auxiliary priorities during my year as commander included youth involvement, local veterans' assistance and meeting the needs of all caregivers. I thank DAV for your members' relentless work in the effort to bring caregiver equity to the forefront. I know we will continue that march and reinforce the need for pre-911 caregiver benefits for all our most severely disabled heroes – whether they were wounded or made ill in wartime service.

Another area of great importance is the involvement of young family members in DAV and Auxiliary community projects. This involvement doesn't just look great on a college scholarship application or job resume; I look at it as a character builder and an education in life.

Just looking at my grandkids' involvement and the junior members in my state alone; it is amazing how they have come to know volunteerism and community service as second nature and, most importantly, the right thing to do. Fundamental social interaction skills, respect and patriotism are naturally instilled as they work alongside veterans and families during these worthy service projects.

I'm pretty sure almost everyone in this room has young family members who can benefit from these types of experiences.

If they aren't involved, why not take them along with you on your chapter or unit's next project? Those kids can invite their friends to help, and this can create a snowball effect where their families might pick up an interest in supporting the organization—and our nation's heroes.

Everyone will benefit from that experience in the long run.

These young people don't have to be DAV Auxiliary members to help out. But in case you didn't already know, junior membership is complimentary through age 17, and we do encourage their parents to sign them up.

These local activities accumulate hours that can be reported on DAV's Local Veterans Assistance Program and the Auxiliary's annual reports. This information gives recognition to the services we provide to the veteran community and can act as a motivating factor to those considering joining our ranks.

For those departments and chapters that don't currently have a working relationship with your Auxiliary counterpart, I ask you to take that first step to invite them to partner with you on a future project. Those long-delegated roles of cooking and providing pre-meeting meals and hall cleaning do not define the DAV Auxiliary, and National Adjutant Pat would agree that we have to shift away from that type of mindset and aim for more important opportunities and goals.

When I joined the Auxiliary in 2005, I wasn't new to the DAV family. My wife, Teresa, had been very involved in DAV and when she needed my help, I was there—our whole family was there. Finally being able to join the Auxiliary was a life-changing opportunity.

When I mailed that membership application off to headquarters, I didn't foresee that I would be elected to serve as the first male DAV Auxiliary National Commander. My goal was to simply serve alongside other DAV Auxiliary members and join DAV in a united mission of service.

Let's strengthen both DAV and the Auxiliary by working together and supporting each other. The DAV Auxiliary motto is "Making a Difference." Each of us has the capability to make a difference every single day—and we do.

I don't say these words without conviction — I truly thank you for your service to our country and for the sacrifices each of you made during and as a result of your military service. Most importantly, thank you for giving my family and me the opportunity to enjoy the freedoms we have in this great country.

Thank you, Commander Metcalf-Foster, for your friendship and partnership. It's been an honor to serve alongside you, and God bless you and your families.

This concludes my report.