



## National Convention Remarks

National Commander Delphine Metcalf-Foster

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Hello everyone! Welcome to Reno, Nevada!

How excited are all of you to get this 97th national convention underway!

Adjutant Burgess, Executive Director Jesinoski, Executive Director Augustine, fellow veterans, families, friends and honored guests—thank you so much for being here and for that great welcome.

When I stood before all of you last year in New Orleans, the realization of taking over this great organization possibly had not quite set in. However, it quickly hit home with a live on-air national interview the next day.

It became crystal clear to me that things were going to stay busy for DAV. There was, and still is, so much work to do. I've worked closely with many of you over the past year and I could not have wished for a better group of people to support me and have my back.

Before I go into more detail about the year's activities, let's talk about our folks who are out there on the front lines each and every day.

If you're a national, chapter, department or transition service officer, please raise your hand.

Hospital service coordinators, community volunteers and DAV Transportation Network drivers, let me hear you!

Thank you so much for your hard work. And thank you to all of our chapter and department leaders. Get your hands up! You keep DAV strong and your service to veterans and families is *vital* to our mission.

We have a lot to be proud of as we reflect back from last summer to now, and I couldn't have done it alone.

A special recognition must be given to DAV Chapter 21. I would be negligent if I did not personally thank my Chief of Staff and past department commander Kirk Johnson; our CEO and past department commander Dan Contreras, as well as my committee members and, of course, the entire Department of California. I simply would not have made it through the past year without all of you. I now ask for all of my Golden State veterans to stand and be recognized.

There are over one million of us in DAV. I'm very proud of that and you should be as well. Last year, our charity secured *more than* 4.3 billion dollars in new and retroactive earned benefits for veterans and their families.

We often hear statistics and they are hard to put into context in our lives. But the folks in this room understand the significance of that particular figure. That's 4.3 billion dollars! That changes a lot of lives and wouldn't be possible without you.

Keeping our promises to America's veterans, their families and survivors is accomplished through service. Service is always at the heart of what we do.

When our message of hope and service is seen, it's a victory for DAV and all veterans.

In 2018, our message was viewed on nearly every major national television and cable network channel. DAV was also highlighted in *Field and Stream* magazine, *Food and Wine*—two of my favorite things—*Money* and *Time* magazines and the *Wall Street Journal*.

From billboards to television to radio, DAV messages garnered more than 6.5 billion impressions this past year! I know there are plenty of people here who have made it their mission to share our public service announcements, and I thank you for the important role you each played in spotlighting DAV throughout your community.

With a growing gap between the military and civilian populations, we need every opportunity we can find to remind the American public of the sacrifices that our nation's heroes have made.

I stood before you last year in New Orleans and promised that we would continue to be the leading voice for unique issues concerning our sisters-in-arms. We continued our advocacy on behalf of women veterans, and the voices of women veterans are sounding off louder than ever. *Sisters-in-arms*, let me hear you. Tell Reno you're here with us!

In March, DAV testified at a legislative hearing on S.804, the Women Veterans Access to Quality Care Act of 2017, and other bills that would improve access to gender-specific care and address the needs of women veterans.

DAV also continued to work with Congress to enact the remaining recommendations from our groundbreaking 2014 report *Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home*. Once more, in August, DAV co-sponsored the 2017 National Women Veterans Summit.

I am pleased to announce that DAV will be releasing a follow-up report on women's veterans in September and hosting an event on Capitol Hill. We will remain steadfast and dedicated to these causes until women have the support they earned through service.

Another major legislative priority is the ongoing battle for our unsung heroes—Fairness for all of our relentless and dedicated caregivers.

As a part of our efforts to expand the VA's comprehensive caregiver assistance program to veterans of ALL ERAS, DAV took part in a House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee roundtable discussion in April and testified in May before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee in support of the Military and Veteran Caregiver Services Improvement Act of 2017.

We followed up our efforts with a letter signed by 44 organizations calling for the enactment of the caregiver improvement act and even drove the efforts behind a petition that was signed by 182,000 supporters and delivered to Congress.

Our hard work paid off. Just a couple of months ago, DAV was on Capitol Hill to see the House Committee on Veterans Affairs approve bipartisan legislation that would expand caregiver benefits to earlier generations of veterans.

It was signed into law by the president last month and significantly improves access to veterans and caregivers wounded before 9/11.

This is a major milestone, but we will not slow down or flinch in our unwavering support and will ensure the swift implementation of this new law.

As a former caregiver to my late husband, who was also a veteran, this effort is near and dear to my heart, and I know Jimmy would be proud of your hard work. I know I am. Thank you.

In New Orleans, I asked for your help in furthering our mission of providing a lifetime of support to veterans and their families, and you have delivered.

We were busy people indeed! Thanks to our members, DAV has a lot to be proud of, but there is still much more work to do.

We must remain strong to be the organization that fellow veterans, their families and supporters deserve and look to when a veteran is in need.

We must continue our efforts in addressing veteran employment, especially employment for disabled veterans and veteran under-employment.

I hope you leave Reno with the mindset of recruiting other veterans under our name. The camaraderie we enjoyed in uniform is here in this room. It's a feeling that only we can understand, but we can share it with our fellow veterans.

Leading an organization like DAV isn't easy, but it remains one of the greatest honors of my life. It has been a very rewarding experience, and I made many friends along the way. The memories of my year as your commander will last a lifetime.

I am proud of what we have accomplished together, but remain hungry for more.

We will march forward to meet the needs of our returning veterans and their families.

I must offer a special thanks to Marc, Barry, Garry and our directors who form the strategic force that makes DAV so successful. They honor our volunteers and advocates in the field with their thoughtful leadership.

They are impressive people who DAV is lucky to have. Serving with them and alongside you has been an honor. I want all of you to know that I believe our organization is a great place as a result of leadership at the chapter, department and national levels. I've learned so much from all of you.

I hope in the years to come, I'll get to know more of you and continue my service—just in a different capacity.

Before my time is through, in keeping with our tradition, I hope you will allow me to honor you with my final salute for all you do to ensure we maintain our mission of providing a lifetime of support for our veterans, their families and survivors.