Good afternoon and thank you so much.

Dennis, it has truly been an honor coming through the ranks with you. I am thrilled to follow in your footsteps, having learned so much from you. I also feel privileged to call you a friend and a mentor. Thank you for your leadership and advocacy over the past year.

As I stand here and look throughout this room, I want to be clear about one thing—today isn’t about me—today and the next year is all about our members and our fellow veterans all across this nation.

I am here to make sure ALL of your voices are heard and to fight as hard as I can to protect our benefits and FIGHT for legislation that positions all veterans in the best possible situation.

As this great organization is set to turn 100-years-old, I couldn’t be prouder to be in a position to jump-start DAV’s success for another century.

Before I go any further I want to take this opportunity to thank all of my friends and mentors from The North Star State who have helped me get to where I am today.

All of us in this room know that nobody does it alone, and I couldn’t thank all of them enough.

I’ve had the honor of meeting great DAV leaders—people like former Director of Voluntary Services, Jerry Steelman who taught me so much about our national programs, and how and why DAV operates the way it does. He is truly missed.

Leaders like Past Department of Minnesota Commander Dean Ascheman. Dean was a tremendous mentor to me while I learned the ropes of being a department adjutant. He showed me what it took to be a leader in the organization.

I met Past National Commander Lyle Pearson at my very first chapter meeting and I remember him telling me how great it was to see younger veterans getting involved with DAV. He told me it would be the younger veterans who will keep the organization strong. That continues hold true as speak to all of you here today. He is missed.

Last but not least is Past Department Commander Greg Remus. Greg, thank you so much for being here today and for the kind words. I couldn’t have gotten here without you.

These individuals taught me so much about DAV and I will do all I can over the next year to make them and the state of Minnesota proud.

And, no, I did NOT forget all of the wonderful members of my home chapter—DAV Chapter 10 in Mankato, Minnesota!
In 2007, I returned from what was nearly a two-year long deployment to Iraq. Upon my return, I realized something all too familiar to those of us in this room today. I wasn’t the same person.

I came to the realization that many things I truly enjoyed before my deployment had drastically changed.

I am not sure if it was the injuries I sustained during a mortar attack, the time away from home or the time spent with some of the greatest men and women I have ever met while deployed—but something had certainly changed.

On several occasions, my best friend and wife, Kim and I would have heart-to-heart conversations about our path forward.

I was working for some really good companies. Companies that did a really good job at supporting their employees, but I still was not happy.

I owe Kim a huge debt of gratitude, as she was the one who pointed out that I would literally jump toward my phone when I saw an incoming call from a fellow soldier.

To me, it was business as usual. A soldier needed me and I was going to be there for them. However, Kim, saw something else. She saw an opportunity. A new calling. A new purpose for me. It was her who suggested and encouraged me to try and find a place that allowed me to surround myself with soldiers and their families.

Kim, it wasn’t the first time you changed my life, but I owe all of this to you.

Taking care of my fellow soldiers, veterans and their families was now what drove me.

I was lucky enough to work as a coordinator with Beyond the Yellow Ribbon—a comprehensive program that creates awareness for the purpose of connecting service members and their families with community support, training, services and resources.

Throughout my time with Beyond the Yellow Ribbon I was able to learn a lot about all of the veteran service organizations in our community, but one stood head and shoulders above the rest.

DAV was the place for me. My ideals and beliefs aligned perfectly with DAV’s mission and I wanted to be a part of it.

In 2012, a great opportunity came my way and I started working with the DAV Department of Minnesota.

Seeing first-hand how DAV is there each and every day helping veterans had a huge impact on me.

DAV gives us the unique opportunity to empower and improve the lives of our fellow veterans. It helps us ensure promises are kept. We know our services are substantive and vital.
Just this past Memorial Day, I had the honor to travel to Kuwait and visit with hundreds of deployed soldiers. As great of a trip as it was, it also served as a reminder just how important DAV and our services are.

When these service members return home they will need guidance and they need to know that DAV is there and able to help. They need to know that we will fight for their benefits, help them find their next career or simply assist with any needs they may have.

DAV has lasted for nearly 100-years based on this premise and will last 100 more if we stay true to our core principles.

I feel blessed to include my DAV family as a source of strength and inspiration. Over my time with DAV I was given the opportunity to learn and to lead.

Despite being a robust national organization, DAV truly makes its impact in a grassroots fashion at the local community level.

It could be talking to your new neighbor, talking to someone at the grocery store or at Church. My point is, each and every one of you in this room has critically important roles to fill to help ensure our success for another 100-years.

Finally, I ask each of you to take on a mentoring role. Just like the young soldiers I saw in Kuwait, we’re going to see a lot of young men and women leaving military service.

We need to reach out to them. We need to bring them into our organization and make them part of our community.

We shouldn’t expect them to understand the benefits available to them or the importance of our organization. Be ready to teach them, to reach out to them, to show them the impact we make in veterans or their families lives and give them a chance to serve.

I look forward to working with all of you this year. It’s an honor and a privilege to serve as your national commander and I pledge to work tirelessly to ensure your voices are heard as we continue our nearly 100-year mission of service to the men and women who served.

Thank you so much, and let’s get this started!