

**Remarks by
Larry Polzin
National Commander
of DAV
at the
91st National Convention
Las Vegas
August 7, 2012**

Good afternoon, National Commander Samuels, National Adjutant Wilson, Department and Chapter Commanders, Auxiliary members, honored guests, friends, and my fellow members of Disabled American Veterans.

Thank you all very much. Thank you for this humbling opportunity to serve you. I take this immense honor and responsibility very seriously. You can be sure that I will put my all into carrying on the highest traditions of this organization, working vigorously for every disabled veteran, their families and survivors. Together, we will continue standing up for veterans and fulfilling our promises to the men and women who served.

In 1971, I found myself in a tough place – The company that hired me after I was discharged from the Marine Corps five years earlier, suddenly turned its back on me when it was discovered that I needed open-heart surgery. Laid up in a VA hospital, a DAV Department of California Service Officer stopped in to check on me. He offered to help me file a claim for the benefits I had earned. It was so encouraging to meet a fellow veteran who was committed to helping me – for free. Later, he asked if I wanted to join DAV. I hadn't thought of that until then. Of course, I quickly said yes. I am grateful that he asked me.

So next time you are out asking new veterans if they want to join us, just think, you may be recruiting a future national commander!

As I became active in the organization, I was offered a job as an NSO. It was an amazing chance to help my fellow veterans. That has been my life ever since.

You can be assured that I remember where I came from and that I will stay focused on our core mission – fulfilling our promises to the men and women who served.

I want to express my personal gratitude to a few of the incredible people who made this a reality for me:

Thank you to the entire 16th District and the Department of California. A special thank you to the late Ken Musselman. I would not be up here today if it weren't for his guidance, support and encouragement. We all dearly miss him.

Would those of you from District 16 please stand, if you can?

You are an incredibly dedicated group, and you each mean a great deal to me. I would not be up here without your longtime support. I am going to do my best to make you proud.

A very special thanks to my entire family. I am very fortunate to have my two sons here. My son Leigh, a Marine Corps veteran and DAV member, is accompanied by his daughter, Lindsey. My son, Lance, is here from Ohio with his son, Logan, and his beautiful wife, Shannon.

My sister, Shirley, and her husband, Alan Tanner, are here.

I also have some close, personal friends I want to recognize. Robert Hasker and his wife Dotty are here. Robert and I joined the Corps together on the buddy program, and we've stayed close ever since.

Duane Villensor and his wife, Sylvia, also join us today from Arizona. Duane and I have been close friends since we were both in uniform. He is a Navy veteran.

And most importantly, I want to thank my wife, Judy. She has gone to almost all the department conventions with me, keeping me going. She has always been there for me, and I can never thank her enough.

I would like to congratulate Commander Samuels on an outstanding year. Commander, you have made all of us proud and will be a very tough act to follow. Thank you for your deep dedication to injured and ill veterans, their families and survivors.

Lastly, through the leadership, vision and dedication of Art Wilson, our professional staff in Cold Spring and Washington continue to take this organization to new levels, further distinguishing DAV as the unquestioned leader among veterans' service organizations. We owe all of you our sincere appreciation. Thank you.

I believe DAV is the very best because we have the best leader. Throughout the years, Art keeps an amazing corps of volunteers and staff focused on what DAV is all about, making sure everyone is headed in the right direction.

It is an immense honor to stand before you on this stage today. No other group comes close to your dedication. Your service to the men and women whose service and sacrifice have kept America strong and free cannot be matched.

I am very much looking forward to this year and the challenges that will come with the divisive atmosphere in Washington and during an election year.

That said, we stand ready to work with the government so that the nation can keep its promises to the men and women who have served, helping whoever wins in November understand and address the needs of injured and ill veterans and their families.

Our biggest challenge remains doing all we can to help VA put into place a new, much quicker and a whole lot more accurate claims processing system. As veterans helping veterans, we need to aid those who are suffering, getting them the benefits they deserve before it is too late.

To have a successful year, I need everyone to continue being relentless. Our grassroots organization sets DAV apart from everyone else. All of us, our blue caps in particular, we need to ensure our government knows that the VA urgently needs to modernize the disability benefits claims processing system.

I am counting on chapter and department leaders to continue taking an active role. Leading from the front and mentoring our newer members is key to really embracing our younger injured and ill veterans, showing them they are needed to help ensure our future. Every single veteran is important to our success.

I am excited about continuing our relationship with Harley-Davidson during my term. The Harley's Heroes program is doing great things for veterans by getting our Mobile Service Offices into communities around the nation, helping us bring benefits, education, and counseling to our veterans free of charge. I appreciate Harley-Davidson's commitment, and I appreciate our skilled counselors who are developing and prosecuting veterans' claims.

Our Voluntary Services Program is as strong as ever, making sure the injured and ill men and women who served are not left behind, taking them to their medical appointments. Getting them the care they need and earned.

Our volunteers are in the hospitals, visiting disabled veterans at home, going where the government cannot or will not go. DAV is leading the way, and I am extremely proud to be a part of this organization.

Please, could all of our volunteers who are present stand, if you can, to be recognized?

Our largest endeavor in fulfilling that mission is our Service Program. Clearly, our unparalleled program is DAV's backbone, extending from the chapters through the departments to the national level. For those of you who make it your mission to serve, I sincerely thank you.

Our Transition Service Officers and Department and Chapter Service Officers are on the proverbial frontlines, carrying our flag, continuing the outstanding tradition of service. They are meticulous, ensuring that every earned benefit is received. I am particularly proud of the jobs they do and they are most deserving of our support.

After more than 25 years as a National Service Officer myself, I know how much hard work and dedication it takes to provide the level of service that DAV pledges to deliver.

Our NSOs have never wavered in their commitment to serve our nation's service-connected disabled veterans, their families and survivors. No one has more impact on our organization's ability to meet our primary mission. No one has more impact on our organization's stellar reputation. And I believe no one has a tougher task than those of you representing veterans and their families with claims for benefits from the government.

As more and more active duty and recently discharged veterans learn about the DAV, we will continue seeing more and more veterans seeking the help of our NSOs, TSOs and Department and Chapter Service Officers. Please, ensure you are prepared to provide them with the very best service possible. They deserve it. Those veterans, their families and this wonderful organization depend on you to be ready.

Please, could all of our service officers who are present stand, if you can, to be recognized?

Thank you so much for this opportunity, this responsibility and this honor.

God bless you, God bless those still serving, God bless the DAV and God bless America.

Thank you.

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