

**Remarks by  
Donald L. Samuels  
National Commander  
Disabled American Veterans  
91<sup>st</sup> National Convention  
Las Vegas, Nevada  
August 4, 2012**

★ ★ ★

Good morning, and welcome to Las Vegas. Let's begin our 91<sup>st</sup> National Convention! I can tell you, we are in for a great time.

I know you are ready to get down to business. We have much to do over the next few days. Our work here is a labor of honor and appreciation extended to those who have served and sacrificed for our country.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve as your National Commander. It has been a year in which I witnessed DAV's work from a wholly new perspective. I can say, without reservation, it was an amazing year in my life, and one I will treasure.

I want to thank my wife, Sandra, and my family for all the support they gave me during this very busy year. I also want to thank (names).

This has been the busiest and most productive year of my life, and I thank all of you for your support.

Among the most exciting events during my year of service were visits to the White House to discuss veterans issues with President Obama and the First Lady. I was impressed that they consider veterans a national priority. In particular, it was an honor to represent DAV at a special White House dinner for veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and, as our National Adjutant Art Wilson can tell you, it was such an inspiring event.

During the year, I also met with Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki about many DAV issues. I found these meetings to be very productive and informative. We discussed the needs of injured and ill veterans and ways to better serve them. We all witnessed landmark results of cooperation as the VA engaged DAV and other veterans service organizations to improve progress in claims processing, caregiving, homelessness and other vital issues.

On Capitol Hill, I met with Senate and House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairs Patty Murray and Jeff Miller to discuss our vital legislative issues. They are powerful and vocal advocates for our veterans.

It was a great honor to represent our 1.2 million DAV members at a joint meeting of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees during our Mid-Winter Conference. The support provided by the hundreds of DAV and Auxiliary members in the audience was both empowering and humbling. They were the thunder of the DAV storm supporting veterans legislation. There are no better advocates than our members to drive our message home to Congress.

Among the most rewarding opportunities I had this year was meeting with DAV members at Department conventions across our nation. It's truly heartwarming to greet so many who are the heart and soul of our organization. They are the force that makes our legislative, service and voluntary services programs work. Without doubt, DAV has the most dedicated members of any veterans service organization.

Those conventions also gave me the opportunity to meet with volunteers who donate their time as Transportation Network drivers, service officers, VAVS volunteers and our Local Veterans Assistance Program volunteers who work on behalf of veterans in communities around the nation.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention one more personal highlight. In May and earlier this month, I was able to attend DAV Airshow Outreach Program events at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point and Oshkosh, Wisconsin. In addition to the outreach, I was able to speak before a class of first graders whose parents were on active duty. It was inspiring to hear them talk about their parents' and grandparents' military service. And difficult to hear that some of their folks had been injured.

It was a reminder that the impact of war takes many forms. Flying through the sky during the shows, I thought of our brave World War II veterans and how they experienced combat. On the ground in Vietnam, I saw how military service and sacrifice are a shared experience. The horror of war impacts those who've served, their caregivers and the generations who follow.

I was also reminded of how important it is to educate our fellow citizens about military service and our mission.

When we speak to children, we plant a seed that will make all the difference for veterans who need future leaders who are in tune with our cause.

DAV Mobile Service Offices help us deliver benefits, education and counseling to small towns throughout the nation. Staffed by highly trained professional National Service Officers, who are skilled experts in developing and prosecuting veterans' claims, the MSOs bring service to veterans in communities far from our offices.

Another heart-warming event was the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, where I witnessed the transformation of veterans from being unsure of their future to men and women filled with hope and confidence. The winter sports clinic is truly the Miracle on a Mountainside where we help fulfill our promises to the men and women who served.

I want to give my special thanks to our professional National Service Officers and Transition Service Officers who each day bring great honor to our mission in its most meaningful way. They are dedicated men and women who devote their lives to service for veterans. They, along with our Department and Chapter Service Officers, are at the core our service to veterans.

Working with leaders like National Adjutant Art Wilson, National Headquarters Executive Director Marc Burgess and Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski has been a rewarding experience. On a daily basis, they manage our organization with an unsurpassed level of professionalism. I thank them for sharing their wisdom and leadership with me. They and their very capable staffs made my job easier and quite enjoyable. I became a better National Commander because of them.

To advance our mission, we clearly need the support of the American people. That means helping them understand who we are and what we do. This is being accomplished by the wide variety of outreach programs and initiatives we offer to injured and ill veterans.

Throughout this year I have experienced the spirit of DAV wherever I went – this remarkably inspiring spirit of veterans helping veterans. And I am very proud of the good work that DAV does to honor those who served.

Each of you can help do that this fall. When you go to the polls this November vote for the men and women who will stand up for veterans. Congress next year will have an opportunity to be of great service to injured and ill veterans, so please vote – and vote with your heart.

I truly believe we are entering a critical time in the history of our organization. We have and continue to welcome home a new generation of veterans. They need our leadership and mentorship. They need to know that we are there for them.

Every day, we hear more and more about what Chapters and Departments are doing in their communities to serve our veterans and reach out to the public. More and more often, we're seeing DAV in print and on television.

Outreach is important. Our ability to clearly communicate who we are and what we do in our local communities is critical.

Our fellow citizens want to be a part of our cause. When we engage them through our activities, we plant an important reminder in their hearts.

Over the course of nine decades, we've seen generations of veterans return from battle. We've seen different outcomes.

Fewer and fewer of our fellow citizens are serving in the military.

The more we can do to tell our stories, the more likely it will be that our fellow Americans will remember and honor our organization as our needs grow.

In an over-communicated world, we as veterans, and as an organization, need to have an active relationship with the public on whom we rely for support.

Now is a time to seize on the momentum of history. Now is a time for us to embrace new ways of spreading our message and to think strategically about how we can own the place we deserve in their hearts and minds.

This year, in addition to your efforts, DAV released two public service announcements that are reaching a growing audience of more than 102 million.

The popularity of these releases shows the value our fellow citizens and the media place on our cause. We must strike while the iron is hot. We must be open to change and evolve in how we spread our message.

As I close my year as National Commander, I am giving special thanks to all our members. You serve your fellow veterans with pride and dignity, with the same honor and courage that you served our nation with. For you war has not ended, nor will it ever. Service is what sets you apart, earning you the proud distinction as honored *veterans*.

This is an exciting time. I'm proud to have been your National Commander at this juncture in our history, and I'm even more excited about the opportunities that lie ahead for our organization.

May you, DAV and our nation always be blessed. Thank you.

###