

**Remarks by
Donald L. Samuels
National Commander-Elect
of the
Disabled American Veterans
at the
90th National Convention
New Orleans
August 9, 2011**

National Commander Tyson, 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. It is an immense honor and responsibility that I take very seriously. You can be sure that I will put my all into carrying on the great traditions of this organization, working tirelessly for every disabled veteran, their families and survivors. Together, we will continue standing up for veterans and keeping our pledge to leave no veteran behind.

(APPLAUSE)

When I was discharged from the Marine Corps in 1969, I came to a crossroads. At that point in my life – a young, wounded Vietnam veteran dealing with a disability – my life could have taken many different directions. But the DAV was there for me with much-needed help. Then they offered me a chance to help my fellow veterans. I have been hooked on this, the finest veterans service organization anywhere, ever since.

Being elected into this office is well beyond anything I could have ever imagined when I first became a National Service Officer. But now that I am here, you can count on me to always remember our one mission – improve the quality of life for disabled veterans, their families and their survivors.

(APPLAUSE)

It would only be right to start by thanking some of the incredible people who really made this a reality for me:

Thanks to the entire 8th District, led by NEC Gerald Humphries, and to the entire Department of Tennessee, particularly my Department Commander Sammy Rogers; Past Department Commander George Martin; the Tennessee Auxiliary and the 8th District Auxiliary.

Would those of you from the Departments of Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana and Tennessee, please stand, if you can?

You are truly one of the premier groups in this great organization, and I would not be up here without your longtime support. I am going to do my best to make you proud.

(APPLAUSE)

A very special thanks to my entire family. My daughter Deborah Wright and her daughter, my granddaughter Hollie are here. As are my son Don Jr. and his wife Tawana. Don is a U.S. Marine Master Gunnery Sergeant and a combat veteran of Desert Storm and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Their son, and my grandson, Donald the 3rd.

Nicole Samuels, my youngest son's wife, is here. My youngest son Staff Sargent Joshua cannot be here today. He is a flight engineer in the U.S. Marine Corps and is currently deployed to Italy in support of operations in that region. He is a veteran of combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan.

My youngest daughter Patricia and her husband Junior Harris.

I have seven other grandchildren who are not able to be here today.

I also have some close, personal friends of mine I want to recognize. My sister-in-law Patty and her husband Bob Peacock. Bob was a submariner in the U.S. Navy. Vader Stultz, a U.S. Marine Vietnam veteran, and his wife Wanda. Midge Straub and Chuck Straub, a retired Air Force veteran. Vader, Chuck and Bob are all disabled veterans and life members of the DAV.

And most importantly, I want to thank my wife, Sandy. She has supported my work with veterans for many years. She tells me a lot, there is a veteran at the front door of our home, I ask "How do you know it's a veteran?" she says, "Because they have a VA letter in their hand."

(APPLAUSE)

I would like to congratulate Commander Tyson 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 disabled veterans.

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

Art was a highly respected National service officer when I first came aboard. Everyone was aware of his technical abilities and we all looked up to him. I believe the DAV is what it is today, which is the best, because Art remembers what the DAV is all about and ensures everyone around him understands it, too.

(APPLAUSE)

It is such an honor to stand before you. No other organization's membership body can match 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 current volatile atmosphere in Washington and a very important election year just around the corner.

No matter, we stand ready to work with the government so that the needs of veterans are understood and addressed in a way that will improve the care and quality of life for disabled veterans and their families.

Standing up for veterans also means making sure everyone knows how to get needed care. We, as veterans helping veterans, need to aide those who are suffering. They need to know about the hotlines the VA has setup, about the VA facilities offering free and immediate care. We need to know what symptoms to watch for, and we need to help other veterans and their families and friends understand the truths about PTSD.

To have a successful tour, I need everyone to continue charging forward. 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.

Not only does the VA need to get claims through much faster, they must get them through correctly the first time.

This means we need chapter and department leaders to take an active role themselves. We must lead from the front and be mentors to inspire newer members to help ensure our future. That said, we need to really embrace our younger disabled 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 Office into communities around the nation, helping us bring benefits, education, and counseling to our veterans free of charge to them and their families. 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 sick and disabled veterans 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. The DAV is leading the way, and I am proud to be a part of this organization and even prouder to have been chosen to lead it.

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

(APPLAUSE)

Our largest endeavor in fulfilling that mission is our Service Program. Clearly, our unparalleled program is the backbone of the DAV, 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, National 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 about 20 years as an NSO myself, I am well aware of the dedication it takes to properly provide the level of service that we, as an organization, pledge to deliver.

Our CSOs, DSOs, TSOs and 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. In addition to the long hours, often frustrating circumstances and tedious tasks, a service officer must have a solid understanding of the claims process in its complex entirety.

Recognizing the vital importance of chapter and department service programs to the fulfillment of DAV's overall mission of service to veterans, National offers the highly-acclaimed Department & Chapter Service Officer Certification Program. I feel strongly that every single service officer in the entire organization should complete this program during my term as your National Commander.

The program is designed to enhance the knowledge and professionalism of the non-accredited Department and Chapter Service Officer. Claims work is covered in detail, explaining the adjudication process from start to finish, providing the knowledge necessary to creating a successful and quick claim. It also covers benefits, entitlements, compensation, pensions, and several other imperative topics. In short, it will make you an effective service officer and an asset to your community.

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

As combat in Iraq, Afghanistan and other places draws down, and as more and more active duty and recently discharged veterans learn about the DAV, we will continue seeing more and more veterans knocking on our doors in need of our help. 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.

(APPLAUSE)

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.

(APPLAUSE)