

**Remarks by
Wallace E. Tyson
National Commander
Disabled American Veterans
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Good morning. Welcome to our 90th National Convention! We've got a lot of work to do, so let's get started.

I want to begin by thanking all of you for giving me the opportunity to lead this great organization. Serving as your National Commander is a serious responsibility, but also one that I loved.

I have been impressed by the terrific job done by all of you as we carry out our mission. Our National Service Officers and Transition Service Officers are the finest of any veterans service organization. Our Department and Chapter Service Officers are superb. Our Transportation Network drivers, volunteers and our professional staff are the very best.

I was deeply touched by the service of our NSOs during the recent outbreak of tornadoes. In Alabama, Missouri, North Carolina and elsewhere, I witnessed their compassion as they rendered disaster aid to disabled veterans. DAV was the first veterans service organization on the scene. It will always be my memory of how well they served the victims of these disasters.

Let's give them all a big hand of applause for the great job they did...

(Applause)

I traveled a lot this year. Everywhere I went there were warm receptions for the DAV. Our mission really resonates all across the country and is carried out with dedication. I'm very proud of the DAV.

We also enjoy an international reputation as well.

At the World Veterans Federation in Paris, the late Past National Commander William Cooper was honored with a federation service award. DAV accepted it for Cooper's family. He led our great organization in 1960-1961.

It was a day in which DAV stood with our allies. And at the beaches in Normandy, I could see where my uncle came ashore on D-Day. It was a special moment for me. It redefined what the DAV has done over the last 91 years to help veterans.

(Pause)

Here at home, though, it's a different story. This year's political debate on federal funding and raising the debt ceiling has brought out some troubling news. Some of the proposals being debated directly threaten veterans benefits now and in the future.

It has been made clear that veterans' health care and benefits are in the line of fire of budget cutters.

The possible consequences of allowing our nation to default on our loan payments means that there'd be no money to pay for some government programs. President Obama made it clear that it wouldn't stop with Social Security. Included is veterans' disability compensation, which could suddenly stop if the debt ceiling is reached.

VA health care will continue, thank goodness. That's because the DAV stood up for veterans by supporting advance appropriations for veterans. But what about the rest of the Veterans Health Administration? There we could see funding cuts.

Also at risk are the new GI Bill, vocational rehabilitation and employment and dependents' education programs.

I'm not pointing the finger at any political party or branch of government. There's enough fault to go around. But I am warning you that if we do not stand up smartly and strongly for the benefits earned by our sacrifice for our beloved country, we will be tapped as a source of funding cuts.

I warn you to be vigilant...to be involved...to be pro-active in support of the DAV's fight for adequate funding. No nation can exist for long by forgetting the sacrifices of its veterans. And no nation can "promote the national defense" without caring for its veterans.

We need to let those in Washington know that taking our earned benefits IS NOT A SLAM DUNK.

Most in our nation honors our service. I witnessed that during a visit to the Intrepid Sea, Air and Space Museum.

The DAV is an important sponsor there along with a number of corporate giants.

I was impressed with the recognition we got as equals from these corporations because of our mission of service to veterans and our sacrifices on the field of battle. These corporations are clearly aware of what is at risk today, and they choose to stand behind veterans. They are powerful allies.

At the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, I saw severely injured veterans regain their sense of achievement and self-esteem. They took part in activities that they might have believed impossible. DAV will continue to be a co-sponsor, but without adequate funding, will the VA continue its participation.

We have our supporters in Congress. I saw that up close and personal last spring. But more importantly, it was your support that counted. It was a thrill to get your tremendous support as I addressed a joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees at our Mid-Winter Conference.

I was deeply grateful for your enthusiasm as we presented the DAV's legislative agenda to Congress. It is another memory I will treasure. And I want to thank our professional staff for preparing me for such an important task.

I can tell you this: We are powerful advocates for veterans because our advocacy program is so powerful. Next year, and for many years after, we are going to need all the horsepower we can get just to keep what we have earned.

(Applause)

On two occasions, I was able to meet with both the President and the Vice President. As National Commander, I was able to speak to them one-on-one. I felt the responsibility of representing each of you before the leaders of our nation.

I am privileged to have had a role in presenting your interests and advancing our goals. It would not have been possible without your support.

As National Commander, I worked with our outstanding professional staffs. Their knowledge and commitment to protect our interests is without question. They are the ones who stand up to our government to ensure their responsibilities to veterans are met.

We are blessed to have intelligent and knowledgeable leadership at every level of our organization.

National Adjutant Art Wilson is my close friend and excellent advisor. His wisdom and leadership result from a lifetime of service to veterans. His dedication and skills are the finest. I truly honor his friendship and trust his leadership. He is one hell of a leader and manager of the team.

Executive Directors Marc Burgess in Cold Spring, Ky., and Barry Jesinoski in Washington, D.C., provide unequalled guidance and foresight. They have enabled me to serve the needs of the DAV more successfully.

And I also want to express my thanks and appreciation to Dave Gorman who just retired as Washington Headquarters executive director.

All of our highly professional staffs really know how to carry out our mission. I can't thank them enough for their support this year.

I especially want to commend my line officers – Don, Larry, Mary, Joe and Ron. You have done a fantastic job.

I also extend my deepest thanks to Ninth District National Executive Committeeman Rodney Tucker and National Chief of Staff Bobby Williams for helping me through this year. Retired NSO Area Supervisor Ron Hope in Winston-Salem was a tremendous help. And my thanks to Past National Commander Alan Bowers, who was a superb mentor along with all the other past National Commanders.

And my thanks to the Nominating Committees who allowed me to climb the ladder of National Line Officers to become National Commander.

Thank you for all that you do for veterans. It has been my pleasure to serve with you.

In the future I will always be available to assist whenever and wherever needed.

Finally, thanks to all of you for your trust. Thank you for your support. And thank you for your service to our mission. I carry with me the thoughts of you all. I appreciate your good wishes and confidence. You have given me a lifetime of memories in one short year.

I have served you as my brothers and sisters. I could do no less. There is always more to do, and I am confident that you, the members of DAV, are up to any challenge. Any goal is within your reach because of your dedication and commitment. I'm proud to be a DAV member. And the source of that pride rests in each of you.

Thank you, sincerely, for all that you do. May God bless America, and the men and women who have been placed in harm's way. God bless their families. And, may God bless the DAV. Thank you and keep up the good work.

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