

Good **morning/afternoon**, ladies and gentlemen.

(Thank any VIPs/special guests/event hosts)

**<PAUSE>**

Today is a day of celebration and recognition. But in some ways, it is a solemn one.

Originally observed as Armistice Day, the 11th day of the 11th month marked the anniversary of the end of World War I and honored its fallen. As our country and much of the world mourned, there remained a desperate glimmer of hope that the Great War could indeed be “the war to end all wars.”

Of course, we know that it wasn't. World War II followed less than two decades later. Then the Korean War, Vietnam and the Gulf War. It was only two years ago that we ended America's longest war—the war in Afghanistan.

As war and conflict continued, so too did the courage and sacrifice of American men and women who defended our nation and its interests. Many paid the ultimate sacrifice.

In 1954, as a result of the yearslong campaign led by World War II veteran Raymond Weeks, Armistice Day became Veterans Day, a day to commemorate **all** veterans of **all** wars and eras—past, present and future; living and dead. While the hope of a world without war faded and we continued to mourn our fallen, November 11 became a day of celebration and gratitude.

And so, on this 69th Veterans Day, I am grateful to be here with you to honor all the veterans who came before us, those who stood alongside us and those who will come after us.

To those veterans here today, **thank you**. Your service and sacrifice represent the best of us and the best of America. We salute you and appreciate the great costs that often come with serving.

Veterans and service members, if you're able, please stand to be recognized.

**<LEAD APPLAUSE>**

Let's also take a moment to acknowledge those families who have helped shoulder the weight of war and the burdens of sacrifice. To the mothers, fathers, spouses and children of our military men and women—**thank you.**

**<LEAD APPLAUSE>**

Veterans Day is a time when we remind our fellow Americans to stop and say thank you to those who served. Those simple words are important, but they are just the beginning.

I encourage you, whether civilian or veteran, to dig deeper. Ask questions. *Listen*. Take an interest in the experiences and sacrifices of those who allow us to live out our own stories in a country that is safe and free. Doing so is more powerful than you know.

Just ask DAV member Carrie Roeger (*Roe-Gur*) and her husband Ralph. The Marine veterans are the founders of Semper Fi Bar and Grille in Woodstock, Georgia. But theirs isn't just any bar and grill.

The walls of Semper Fi are ***filled*** with military memorabilia and photographs donated by locals. The restaurant's mission is to foster an environment where veterans feel encouraged to gather and share their stories of service, some for the first time. The result is a thriving community, one that offers connection and healing, sometimes replacing isolation and hopelessness.

***That*** is the power of sharing our stories and listening to others. ***That*** is one helluva way to say thank you.

**<PAUSE>**

The work we do at DAV takes that gratitude and turns it into action. Through our benefits claims assistance, legislative advocacy, employment and entrepreneurship resources, and volunteer opportunities, DAV serves veterans and their families every day of the year. Our mission is to empower everyone who served to lead high-quality, fulfilling lives with respect and dignity.

And as founder and World War I veteran Judge Robert Marx intended over a century ago, DAV remains an organization **of** veterans, **by** veterans and **for** veterans. That shared camaraderie and purpose remains the best chance we have at keeping the promise to all those who sacrificed and continue to sacrifice so much.

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If there's any doubt about what we are able to accomplish together, just look to the members of DAV Chapter 102 in Valparaiso (*Val-puh-RAY-zoh*), Indiana.

It's not uncommon to see a packed parking lot and a line out the door at a Chapter 102 meeting. The chapter benefits advocates who volunteer their time know they're probably in for a long night of claims assistance, sometimes staying until 2 o'clock in the morning.

One of those advocates, retired Army veteran and Department of Indiana 1st Junior Vice Commander Michael Thomas, called the work his "heart and soul." And he's not unique in that regard. That spirit of dedication and passion is what sustains Chapter 102—and it's paying off in big ways.

At one meeting in March, 177 veterans received claims assistance. ***One-hundred-and-seventy-seven!*** In a single night.

That number represents potentially life-***changing*** and life***saving*** benefits for those veterans and their families. Some of them had tried filing claims on their own without success and had given up, until DAV. Others were attending their first DAV meeting and filing their first claim.

Along with expert support, those veterans were greeted by brothers and sisters and welcomed into the local DAV community. As Semper Fi Bar and Grille has discovered, community alone is a powerful force.

**<PAUSE>**



[Another example of veterans helping veterans can be found here locally. <Insert brief description/introduction of local veteran/initiative to recognize>]

**<PAUSE>**

This Veterans Day, let's celebrate what we can accomplish when we come together. Let's recognize that service doesn't end in the military and that "thank you" is just the beginning of gratitude. You being here today tells me you're willing to go further.

So please, lend an ear to the veterans in our community, and if you can, work with DAV to donate your time and efforts to those who served.

Thank you for taking the time to honor our veterans today. God bless you all, bless our veterans and bless the United States of America.

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