

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

[Thank any VIPs/special guests/event hosts]

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This November 11th marks **seventy** years of celebrating Veterans Day.

Since its creation in 1954, we have sent millions more to war. Service members fought in Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan and served in harm's way in numerous other climes and places. And many more answered the call, here and across the world, to ensure America stands ready to defend its national security and our freedoms and interests.

How many others will raise their hands in service to our nation over the *next* seventy years? How will they be called to defend it? How much will they and their families sacrifice in doing so?

Those are questions we can imagine but can't possibly answer. We can hope for peace, foster it and advocate for it, but we cannot stop the wheels of war. We can pray for every man and woman to return from service healthy and uninjured, but we cannot guarantee it.

The unknown is what demands such bravery from those who answer the call. In return for that bravery, we as a nation commit to a sacred promise: to make whole those forever changed by service.

Let this 70th Veterans Day be a reminder of what we *can* do—what duty and gratitude require of us.

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Saying thank you to veterans you encounter is a good place to start and a worthy practice to adopt. It's a simple gesture but one that reminds veterans they're seen and appreciated. When one veteran recognizes another, it reminds both they're not alone.

That thank-you also reminds us—civilian and veteran alike—that we have a promise to uphold. Do ***not*** let that reminder go unheeded.

While the thought of upholding a national promise might seem daunting—after all, you're just one person—we owe it to those who served to face that task with courage. And luckily, there are organizations where "*just one person*" quickly becomes an entire community united by a common goal.

Organizations like DAV and its Auxiliary.

Founded over a century ago, DAV is a national organization representing nearly one million men and women changed by military service. Our purpose is simple: to empower veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity. The DAV Auxiliary is an extension of that work, with nearly a quarter-million members dedicated to the same purpose.

We fulfill our mission through a slate of programs and services that provide comprehensive, lifelong support, including benefits assistance, employment resources, caregiver aid and legislative advocacy.

What's particularly special about the work we do at DAV is that it isn't just **for** veterans and their families—it's done in large part **by** veterans and their families. What's more empowering than that?

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In April, DAV launched its first-ever Community Impact Day. Through this initiative, more than 700 people pledged at least one hour of their time to volunteer for veterans in communities across the country.

In Georgia, Army veteran and DAV Chapter 55 member Anthony Prince cleaned veterans' grave markers at Lawnwood Memorial Park.

In Minnesota, ten DAV volunteers helped Hazel Lewis, the spouse of a disabled veteran, by cleaning up her yard and fixing exterior railings around her home.

In Tennessee, Army veteran Kenny Belew and eight other volunteers collected over 1,000 pounds of food donations for DAV Chapter 39's food pantry.

In Florida, Chapter 16 members visited veterans at senior living facilities around the Orlando area. They also brought care packages and information about veterans benefits.

And in Kentucky, DAV Auxiliary National Adjutant Bunny Clos helped distribute cookies made by a local bakery to veterans in her community.

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That is thank-you in action. And it's just a tiny fraction of what countless others—veterans, their families and civilians—do every day in the name of DAV's mission. In 2023 alone, DAV volunteers logged ***millions*** of hours in VA hospitals and communities nationwide.

That includes those dedicated servants here in [local city/state]. [Insert anecdote of local veteran/volunteer to recognize]

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This Veterans Day, I urge you to ask yourself how ***you*** can help keep the promise to America's veterans. Start in our own community, like those you just learned about.

But also know that it doesn't have to end there. With an organization like DAV, there are opportunities to make far-reaching impacts beyond your backyard. Just look to the two groundbreaking special reports we released this year.

The first, *Women Veterans: The Journey to Mental Wellness*, put a spotlight on the unique factors contributing to the staggering rates of suicide among women veterans. It identified gaps in care and showed how the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system—which was literally designed for men—must do better for women veterans.

The second report, *Ending the Wait for Toxic-Exposed Veterans*, revealed an enduring legacy of failure by the VA and Congress to adequately care for veterans made ill by toxic exposures in service. It proposes a blueprint for dramatically reforming the system in a way that ensures timely, equitable access to lifesaving care and benefits.

Importantly, both reports included personal stories from veterans. They showed us the human toll of the issues and offered invaluable perspective for solutions.

And when it came time to turn these reports into action, DAV turned to veterans and their families—and they delivered. They rallied in their own communities, presenting the reports' findings and recommendations to leaders at their local VA facilities. They talked to their elected representatives at the state and national levels. They educated fellow veterans and hosted special events.

When the recommendations DAV put forth in both reports become laws and policies, know that it was because of veterans and supporters *like you*.

And it's never too late to get involved. The work continues, and we need more of you to help us carry it forward.

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To those veterans here today, ***thank you.*** To the mothers, fathers, spouses and children of our military men and women, ***thank you.*** And to all of those who show your gratitude through action, ***thank you.***

It is my privilege to recognize you. To serve you is a duty I am honored to uphold.

God bless you all, and God bless the United States of America.

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