KEEPING OUR PROMISE TO AMERICA'S VETERANS

VETERANS DAY SPEECH 2026

Good morning/afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

[Thank any VIPs/special guests/event hosts]

<PAUSE>

It's an honor to be here today as we recognize the men and women who've worn our nation's uniform. If you're a veteran and are able, please stand or raise your hand.

<PAUSE>

Take a moment and look around. Each person standing or raising a hand has a story. At the same time, there are different branches, different generations and different roles. What unites them all is that each answered a call to serve something bigger than themselves.

Their willingness to train, to fight and to put their lives in harm's way for our country fuels the selfless service many of us take for granted.

<LEAD APPLAUSE>

Please be seated.

Veterans Day allows us to say thank you. It also asks something more of us. Because when we talk about veterans, it's often in the past tense.

Where they served. What they did. What they sacrificed. Those stories matter. We should tell them and remember them. But a veteran's story doesn't end when the uniform comes off.

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Army veteran Sam Juan knows that better than most. Her path to military service was anything but conventional. She grew up in Bahrain before moving to the United States as a teenager. She eventually joined the Army, first serving as a food service specialist and later as a signals intelligence analyst.

Then came an opportunity that dramatically changed the course of not just her career but her life.

Sam volunteered to join a Cultural Support Team, an initiative that placed female soldiers alongside some of America's most elite special operations forces in Afghanistan.

You may be wondering: Why her? What did U.S. Special Operations Command see in an intelligence soldier who just happened to be a woman?

Well, she more than earned her spot.

She completed a grueling selection program at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, followed by an even more demanding training program. And when it was over, she deployed alongside SEAL Team 6 and other elite special operations units, helping some of America's most highly trained warriors engage with Afghan women in places where male operators simply could not.

The work was demanding. The stakes were high. And Sam carried more than the weight of her equipment. She entered the Army with wounds from childhood trauma. Her combat experiences layered on new ones.

When her time in uniform ended, those wounds didn't simply disappear.

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Coming home is often described as the end of a deployment, a ship's return to port or the end of a military career. For many veterans, it's the beginning of something else entirely.

There are physical injuries to confront. Memories that refuse to stay in the past. Relationships that have changed. A loss of identity or purpose. And the difficult task of figuring out who you are when the uniform that helped explain who you are is hanging in a closet.

Sam struggled.

For years, she searched for ways to address her trauma. She used substances in an attempt to heal, including opioids. Eventually, that search took her somewhere she never expected—to psychedelic-assisted therapy.

She traveled to Mexico for treatment with ibogaine. This psychedelic plant medicine is currently illegal in the United States but has drawn growing interest from veterans, researchers and policymakers for its potential to address conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury and substance use disorders.

For Sam, the experience was profound. It didn’t erase the worst days of her life. It didn’t change what happened to her as a child or in the Army. But it helped her change her relationship with those experiences and opened a new chapter in her life.

And, as incredible as it is to say, Sam hasn’t touched an opioid or any drug after just one treatment.

She also found something that helped her reconnect with herself: art.

Standing in front of a canvas gave her a place to process what she had carried for so long. She calls it her flow state.

“When I get into that flow state,” she said, “there’s a deep exhale.”

Earlier this year, DAV named Sam our 2026 Disabled American Veteran of the Year. Her remarkable story raises an important question for all of us: Are we doing enough to find better ways to help veterans heal?

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For generations, our nation has asked men and women to go wherever they're needed to do whatever their country asks of them. When they come home carrying wounds from that service, we owe them that same determination.

That means providing proven treatments and high-quality care. But it also means continuing to search for better answers when existing treatments aren't enough.

There’s still much to learn about psychedelic therapies—their effectiveness, risks and appropriate use. But DAV strongly believes promising treatments deserve rigorous research and that veterans deserve the opportunity to benefit from medical advances.

Sam’s journey reminds us why that work matters.

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Today, Sam is a full-time artist and an advocate for other veterans searching for their own paths toward healing.

We recognized Sam, but not because her story is complete. We recognized her because of what she’s done with everything that came before and since.

Her story reminds us that military service can shape someone for a lifetime. But her limits aren’t what defines her. Hope does.

And that's worth remembering today.

<PAUSE>

Hope and service are etched into the hearts of DAV's nearly 1 million members. They've gone to war, bled for this country, sacrificed parts of their mind and spent years away from their loved ones.

No one would fault a veteran who just wants to find some well-deserved peace and quiet after all they've endured. But our members. Never. Stopped. Serving. Just as countless veterans do every day around this great nation.

That includes those dedicated servants here in [local city/state]. [Insert anecdote of local veteran serving the community]

<PAUSE>

On Veterans Day, we don't just recognize what our men and women did while in uniform; we celebrate and honor their *continued* service and contributions.

So when you say thank you to a veteran, you might add "for all you've done and all you continue to do." And when you encounter a veteran, don't just ask where they've been; ask where they're going.

And please, don't stop there. Join us! If you're a veteran yourself and looking for ways to continue your service, seek out your local DAV chapter and get involved.

If you're a family member or just someone who wants to put "thank you for your service" into action, talk to your local DAV chapter or DAV Auxiliary unit.

<PAUSE>

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

It’s my privilege to celebrate you all today.

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