

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

(Acknowledge any VIPs/special guests)

First and foremost, I want to begin today by recognizing all those among us who have been a part of the great brotherhood and sisterhood we call the U.S. military—our veterans, active-duty service members, guardsmen and reservists. It is your service and sacrifice that has kept our country safe and free. If you're able, please stand to be recognized.

<APPLAUSE>

No matter which branch you served in, whatever your job path or how many years you served, raising your hand and committing yourself to service in the military was a brave and selfless act. One that resulted in few guarantees—of where you would be assigned; whether and where you might deploy; and, in some cases, if you would return home in one piece, or at all.

Thanks to those who have served and those who continue to serve today, America can sleep peacefully at night.

Military men and women know the risks, but they accept them in many cases so that others won't have to.

DAV life member Dennis Nixon took on those risks when he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps as a teenager during the Vietnam War in 1964. He trained as a combat engineer and was mobilized shortly thereafter. But it was on his second combat tour in 1969 that life as he knew it changed in the blink of an eye.

During a patrol in Da Nang, Dennis tripped a "booby trap." As a result of injuries to his abdomen and leg, he underwent eight surgeries.

After months in the hospital, his leg was amputated.

Sustaining a life-changing injury so young could stop some in their tracks.

But not Dennis.

After medical retirement from the Marine Corps in 1970, he became a DAV benefits advocate and dedicated 36 years to helping his fellow veterans obtain the benefits they earned.

DAV is the leader in ensuring veterans get the benefits they earned through service. It's largely because of the members, volunteers and staff who, for nearly 100 years, have dedicated their lives to the men and woman who served. In 2017 alone, DAV helped service members, veterans, their families and their survivors access more than 4.3 billion dollars in retroactive and annual benefits.

Retirement from DAV didn't stop Dennis from giving back either. Since then he has continued to serve as a volunteer, assisting in the certification training of state and local service officers. He has volunteered with his local DAV chapter in Fort Worth, Texas, and advocated for veterans throughout the Lone Star State and across the country.

And just three months ago, he was elected to the highest office at DAV—national commander.

Dennis is an inspiration to disabled veterans everywhere—myself included. He embodies never giving up in the face of adversity, and instead overcoming obstacles and embracing a new normal.

That refusal to step back and instead step up is something I have seen every day—both in my fellow veterans and DAV members. That fighting spirit on the battlefield carries over as they embark upon the road to recovery. They refuse to back down. They recognize that life may be different—but it is certainly not over.

[Another example of an inspiring veterans can be found here locally. <Insert brief description/introduction of local veteran/DAV member to honor>]

At DAV, we are in the business of not giving up the fight for veterans. We want every man and woman who served to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity. That is a mission we live day in and day out.

We will not leave a brother or sister behind.

That commitment to service over self begins when recruits first raise their right hand to serve—and is an ethos the men and women who served carry with them for a lifetime—on or off the battlefield.

Just a couple months ago, Marines assigned to the Oldest Post in the Corps, at Eighth and [Eye] in our nation's capital, could be seen literally running toward danger. A raging fire had broken out in a neighboring home for seniors, and Marines raced toward the flames to ensure the residents were safe.

They played a pivotal role as first responders and helped ensure nearly 200 residents escaped the burning building.

This illustrates what those of you who served already know: Service doesn't halt when the men and women who serve have returned from war, are at their home duty station or are on leave.

It does not even end after they hang up their uniforms one final time. Over time, every enlistment or commission comes to an end, but veterans' service has no expiration date. We should be grateful not only for their time in the military but for all they do to continue to give back to their country and its citizens long after their discharge is signed.

Vocalizing our gratitude to veterans is a good start, but illustrating our thanks with actions is most impactful.

There are numerous volunteer opportunities across the country through DAV.

In some areas, you can ensure veterans get to their medical appointments by serving as a volunteer driver for the DAV Transportation Network. Like all medical facilities, VA hospitals, nursing homes and clinics need volunteers to perform a wide range of duties. Some work directly with patients, participating in recreational programs and other activities on the wards. Others assist the VA's professional staff or escort patients, serve coffee or simply provide companionship to veteran patients.

If you do not live near a VA facility, there are still many ways to give back. By visiting VolunteerForVeterans.org, volunteers can go grocery shopping or run errands for veterans in their community, do yard work or paint a veteran's home—there's a need you can help fulfill.

For my fellow veterans, you have the ability to connect with a veteran in a way that is unique to those of us who wore the uniform by joining organizations like DAV and getting involved. I encourage you to seek out your brothers- and sisters-in-arms, get to know them and ensure they know you've got their six.

And so does DAV.

DAV exists solely to help veterans achieve a more fulfilling life by helping them attain their earned benefits and health care, find employment, and provide volunteer opportunities through which they can give or receive assistance.

Please feel free to visit our website at DAV.org to find out more about what we do for veterans and ways you can help, or give your local DAV chapter or department a call.

Thank you for taking the time to remember our heroes. They never gave up on us, and we can't give up on them.

While Dennis and thousands of other brave men and women have returned from war throughout our nation's history, there are still service members in harm's way around the world. I would ask you to please pause for a moment to think of those currently standing watch across the globe.

<PAUSE>

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

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