

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

–The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States

The Legislative Process and You



DIW
BENEFITS
PROTECTION
TEAM LEADER



FOREWORD

All American citizens, acting individually or collectively, have the constitutionally guaranteed right to petition their government for a “redress of grievances.” Simply speaking, the First Amendment to our Constitution gives a course of action to anyone who has ever thrown up their hands in frustration and disgust and cried, “There ought to be a law!”

Well, there can be a law, and it can originate from you and others who feel as you do.

In terms of DAV and its federal legislative objectives, this means that you and I and our fellow DAV

members, united in purpose and acting in concert, can petition our government in Washington, D.C., to take a course of action that we feel to be in the best interests of America’s service-connected disabled veterans, their dependents and survivors.

The information provided is intended to acquaint you with the federal legislative actions of our organization, not only those conducted and articulated by the national organization but also all important supplemental and supportive actions provided by DAV/Auxiliary members across the country.

THE RESOLUTION— FORERUNNER OF DAV- INITIATED LEGISLATION

A House or Senate bill, passed by Congress and signed into law by the president, did not just “happen” to come along. It was born in the mind of someone, in response to a recognized need. The originator of the idea could be someone in the White House—the president himself or an advisor. It could be a member of Congress, a legislative assistant or a staff member of some standing committee. Perhaps an employee of any one of a number of federal agencies first came up with the idea. Perhaps it was a lobbyist—those individuals who work in Washington for myriad “interest groups” located throughout the country—and DAV is such an interest group.

But whoever acted as the “catalyst” in Washington and took the initial step toward bill introduction in the Congress, chances are this action resulted from “input” received from some other source—more than likely individuals who would be affected by the legislation.


This certainly holds true for DAV.

DAV’s annual Legislative Programs consist of those measures that have been approved in resolution form each year by the delegates to our annual national conventions or, in the absence of a national convention mandate, those resolutions approved by

the National Executive Committee. Mandates and resolutions adopted at each national convention shall be effective only until the next national convention. In the absence of any mandate to cover any matter wherein laws already enacted by Congress are under attack, the national commander, national adjutant and National Executive Committee are placed under a continuing mandate to resist and oppose any such changes in laws or regulations advocated by any presidential commission, by Executive Order, by special investigative commission created by Congress or by any legislative bill sponsored by any standing or special committee of the Congress that would repeal or deprive veterans or their dependents of benefits already granted by such laws.

DAV resolutions, conceived by individual DAV members, chapters or state departments, can thus be viewed as the initial vehicles used in the promotion of DAV legislative objectives. To introduce a resolution, a member must do so at the chapter level. If it is adopted, it would ascend to the department level. If adopted there, it would lastly ascend to the national level, not later than two weeks prior to the start of the national convention.

At the national level, the resolutions are logged in and the DAV department is notified that its resolution(s) has been received. Resolutions are then assigned to the appropriate convention committee by the Committee on Assignments and Coordination, which is appointed by the national commander. Also



appointed by the national commander are the advisors to each convention committee. These advisors are responsible for the preparation of the advisors' report on the assigned committee resolutions prior to national convention, attending and opening the convention committee meeting at national convention and entering into committee discussions on the resolutions, without the privilege of a vote. If a legislative resolution is adopted at the national convention, our agenda would include efforts to affect legislation accordingly.

Each convention committee is composed of one member or alternate from each national district and from the Blind Veterans National Chapter. Each National Executive Committee member is responsible for conducting a district meeting prior to the opening session of the national convention, where the convention committee delegates are chosen. Everyone who anticipates being selected as a delegate or an alternate should review DAV's current resolutions and familiarize themselves with DAV's legislative goals. More than 80 percent of DAV's resolutions are longstanding, which pertain to matters important to disabled veterans, their families and survivors. Being familiar with these resolutions will assist you as a committee delegate.

PROPER CONSTRUCTION

As the foundation of our legislative program, it is important that the DAV resolution be fully understood in terms of its basic purpose and proper construction. If resolutions are ill-conceived or badly constructed, they act as poor standard-bearers for our legislative mandates and can cause unnecessary problems for those who must identify their purposes and translate them into legislative form. On the other hand, properly constructed resolutions provide identifiable goals that can be easily transposed into bill form.

Webster's Dictionary defines the word resolution as a "formal expression of opinion, will or intent, voted by an official body or assembled group." We like to think of a resolution as the process of putting ideas into words and, hopefully, putting these words into action.

The best way to deal with the proper construction of a resolution is to first break it down into its component parts. In doing so, we find three that can be readily labeled:

Part One, the Title or Statement of Purpose; Part Two, the Whereas Clauses or Justification of Purpose; Part Three, the Resolved Clause or Final Declaration and Course of Action to Achieve the Purpose.

Part One, the Title, should be as concise as possible. A lengthy title will often contain information that should be presented in the Whereas Clauses and thus creates the impression of rambling along. In many instances, a lengthy title wrongfully attempts to tell it all, thereby upstaging the resolution and making everything that follows anti-climactic.

However, a title should not be made too short. Titles of one or two words only will leave everyone completely in the dark about the actual purpose of a resolution. The object is not to keep a person guessing about the intent of the resolution, but to present clear, instant recognition of its purpose.

Part Two, the Whereas Clauses or Justification of Purpose, is the meat of a resolution. It is here that a "sales pitch" is made. The Whereas Clauses are your statement of the facts.

The most common and understandable error can be termed as the "overkill" syndrome—too many Whereas Clauses. In an attempt to build as good a case as possible for their cause, many resolution writers fall victim to overkill and provide superfluous justifications. In making this error, there are too many "don'ts" that are violated.

A few examples: don't repeat yourself, don't exaggerate, don't go astray of the subject, don't unduly antagonize others or don't make unreasonable demands.

Any one or a combination of these and other don'ts in a long-winded list of Whereas Clauses can be boring, create confusion or cause any number of undesired reactions. In short, use the Whereas Clauses to make your point, not belabor it.

The purpose of Part Three, the Resolved Clause, is to explicitly express the course of action to be taken that will achieve your goal.

Here again, a resolution, good in all other respects, can be impaired by an improper Resolved Clause. For example, a common misuse of the Resolved Clause goes something like this:

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that DAV in National Convention assembled in (City, State), (date—month/day, year), supports this goal.



Resolved Clauses of this type are vague about the necessary action to be taken and end the resolution in a very weak fashion. Be specific about the action to be taken.

It is also important to avoid the temptation of continuing to give whereas justifications in the Resolved Clause. Keep your Resolved Clause short and specific.

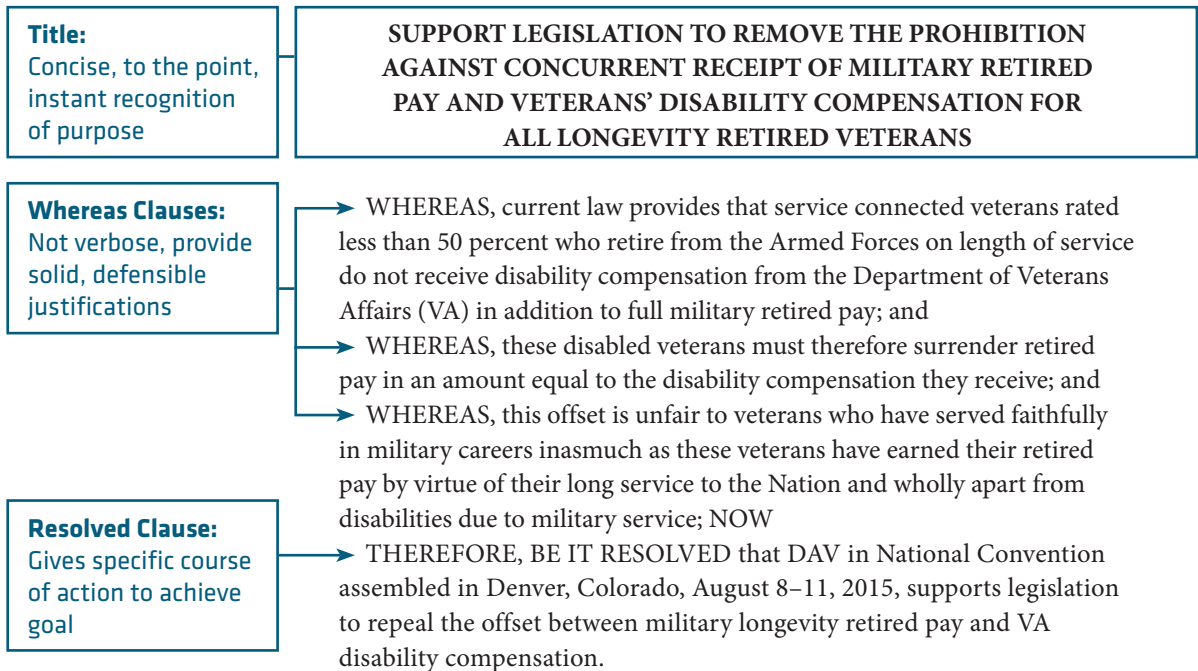
One final point, use the “AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED” addendum sparingly. Most commonly used to indicate parties (the president, members of the House and Senate, etc.) who are to receive copies of the resolution, the content of this clause is commonly misused by inserting unnecessary information or further justifications (Whereas Clauses). If a doubt

exists about using the “FURTHER RESOLVED” addendum, then, as a rule of thumb, do not use it.

Remember, the legislative staff is available to assist you with any questions. You can also visit the DAV website at <https://www.dav.org/learn-more/legislation/resolutions/> to review current resolutions and determine if your idea is currently a resolution or to see how other resolutions were written.

These guidelines should prove useful to those of you who will be drafting resolutions for DAV legislative and administrative goals. If followed, you should find yourself with a trim, hard-hitting, explicit resolution—one that will prove to be an effective vehicle and will greatly improve the legislative effort here in Washington, D.C.

EXAMPLE OF A PROPERLY CONSTRUCTED RESOLUTION





THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS— FROM RESOLUTION TO PUBLIC LAW

Upon return from each national convention, the Washington legislative staff takes the approved resolutions and separates them into two categories—legislative and administrative.

Legislative resolutions are those whose goals can only be achieved, or best achieved, by congressional passage and enactment into law. Administrative resolutions are those measures whose goals can only be achieved, or best achieved, administratively—that is, by dealing with the federal agency involved.

A compensation increase is the most obvious example of a legislative resolution requiring statutory change. Extension of military commissary privileges to a broader category of service-connected disabled veterans would be an example of a goal that could be achieved administratively, through Department of Defense regulatory changes. Generally speaking, administrative resolutions become the responsibility of the national service director or the national employment director and their staffs, while legislative resolutions come under the purview of the national legislative director and staff.

Once the legislative resolutions have been identified, the next step is to translate them into the appropriate technical language in anticipation of their being introduced in bill form in either the House or the Senate. Some measures, identical to resolutions of previous years, will already be in Congress as bills, and drafting and reintroduction will not be necessary. However, this is not true in all cases.

Once a bill has been placed in its proper form, the next step is, of course, to get it introduced in Congress. In this regard, the primary source of DAV legislative sponsors is the membership of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees. The chairs of these two committees, subcommittee chairmen and influential members of the committees are usually approached with measures relating to their particular interests or


sphere of influence. However, DAV does not restrict itself to the Veterans' Affairs Committees alone for bill introduction. In cases where a particular member of Congress is known to be greatly interested in a specific bill, DAV will approach such member with a request for bill introduction, or you can bring a current DAV resolution to the attention of one of your elected officials and ask that he or she introduce a bill. If you do, it is always a good idea to let the legislative staff know. Our organization has also been approached by individual members of Congress themselves with the request that they be permitted to sponsor a particular DAV bill.

After introduction in Congress, bills are then referred to the appropriate standing committees, usually the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees. However, during the course of a year, in addition to the Veterans' Affairs Committees, DAV finds itself directly involved with such committees as: appropriations, budget, government operations, armed services, ways and means, post office and civil service, and more.

Once a veterans bill has been assigned to a standing committee. It is further referred to the appropriate House subcommittee (the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee has no subcommittees). This brings us to the crucial stage in the legislative process, for it is here that our organization must attempt to gain serious consideration of the measure to the extent that congressional hearings are scheduled. At this point, the lobbying activity of DAV is most important and concentrated, and it is by no means conducted by the legislative staff in Washington, D.C., alone. Everyone in DAV—from the national commander down to the individual chapter and DAV member—is involved.

Our legislative program is, of course, formally submitted to the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees during our national commander's legislative presentation, which occurs early in each session of the Congress. However, even before this formal presentation has occurred, the national legislative staff has been in contact with committee members and staff of the two veterans' affairs committees. During informal meetings, the national legislative staff attempts to gain the first serious and sympathetic consideration of our goals.

In this regard, it should be emphasized that DAV has a close, harmonious working relationship with



the professional staff members of the two veterans' affairs committees. The support and cooperation of committee staffers are of paramount importance in gaining committee member support. Staff members are the "in-house" veterans benefits experts of Congress and, with the possible exception of one or two long-standing committee members, committee staffers are the acknowledged experts on veterans benefits and services.

The committee staffers' advice is sought by the members of the committee and, to a great extent, is followed. A commitment of support from the professional staff members of the veterans' affairs committees is of almost equal importance as that of a commitment of support given by the committee chairs themselves. Similarly, opposition or simply lack of support on the part of a committee staffer can mean tough sledding in gaining the support of committee members. If at all possible, DAV will attempt to work through the committee staffer in terms of promoting our legislative goals, as opposed to concentrating solely on the committee members themselves. There have been situations when we have gone directly to the member, but, these situations have been rare.

Coinciding with DAV efforts in Washington are the individual efforts of DAV national service officers, departments, chapters and members across the country. This involvement is usually in the form of a grassroots effort—emails, letter writing, social media and personal contact campaigns. This legislative strategy is a vital tool in the overall DAV legislative effort. Many times members of Congress, who represent varied constituencies, will hold opposite views on issues. However, if there is one objective held in common by all 541 legislators on Capitol Hill, it is their overwhelming desire to be re-elected. As a consequence, congressional members do pay attention to the wishes of the "folks back home." Whenever possible, they will support their constituents' demands. A vocal, timely constituent blitzkrieg can be a very important factor in gaining the successful passage of DAV legislative objectives.

Once congressional hearings have been scheduled, the DAV Washington legislative staff will prepare and present testimony on bills that are of interest to our organization. The congressional committee

hearing process is, of course, an important forum for promoting DAV objectives to Congress.

Hearings on individual bills are usually held by the subcommittees of the full committees. The object is to get a subcommittee recommendation to the full committee which is in line with the DAV position. Achieving this, the next step is a full committee "markup session," during which time the full committee acts on the subcommittee's recommendations. At this time, any last-minute additions or deletions to these recommendations can be made. Following full committee approval, the bill is then "ordered reported" to the floor of the House or Senate for full member consideration and, hopefully, passage.

Here again, depending on the bill and existing circumstances, the DAV lobbying efforts, both in Washington and across the country, could very well be in continuous force.

Once a bill has been approved by the House or Senate, the entire process is repeated in the other legislative body. Many times, in fact, both the House and Senate are acting upon identical or similar legislation simultaneously.

Differences that usually exist between House and Senate passed versions must be resolved before the measure can be sent to the White House. This is usually done in the form of an "informal conference"—the professional staff members of the two veterans affairs' committees meet informally (though under direction of their committee chairmen) and "iron out" the differences. If differences are of a major nature, a "formal conference," composed of the members of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees themselves, may be required.

Once an identical version has been agreed upon through either informal or formal conference, the legislation is then re-passed by both the House and Senate and then, finally, sent to the White House for presidential signature.

"To veto or not to veto" is the question and, of course, when it is felt that a presidential veto is likely, DAV efforts to influence a presidential decision will be conducted. Such efforts may be in the form of a grassroots contact campaign aimed at the White House itself and/or by requesting influential persons



in the president's political party to intercede with him in our behalf.

The president's signature on a DAV objective completes the legislative process.

GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGN

We have mentioned the importance of grassroots actions by our membership in support of DAV legislative activities in Washington, D.C. Before providing a few guidelines on how departments and chapters can best organize and sustain a grassroots effort, perhaps a few words should be devoted to discussing the type of issue which would compel the national organization to call for such an all-out supportive campaign.

The first point to make is that the grassroots effort is undeniably our most effective legislative weapon. Precisely because of that fact, it must not be abused. In today's culture, routine contact with members of Congress through emails, letters, calls or personal visits requesting support for legislation important to injured veterans, their dependents and survivors is not abusive. Today there are many special interest groups trying to get the attention of Congress on issues important to them, and DAV must continually remind Congress of the needs of our members, with your support.

We have all heard the story about the "boy who cried wolf." When the chips were down, and he really needed help, his past abuse of calling for the aid of others spelled his downfall. In other words, not all issues rise to the level of a life-or-death situation. These issues are rare, but when they do occur, you will know it is an all-out grassroots campaign that requires the attention of all members of DAV's grassroots.

If the life-or-death tactic is used too frequently, on all issues both large and small, the time would come when our national membership would hear the call to arms and not respond, or only respond halfheartedly. Or worse, Congress and/or the administration might ignore an important action request if it is believed to be just another routine message from DAV members. If this occurred at a time when the struggle involved the future of an entire benefits program, the result would be disastrous.

For example, if DAV lobbied for an 8 percent disability compensation increase and Congress only

appeared likely to approve a 7 percent or 7.5 percent increase, the DAV Washington staff, while working to convince the House and Senate committees to opt for the higher rate of increase, would not feel compelled to go out with a grassroots campaign to get that additional 1 or .5 percent increase in rates. From the standpoint of the size and importance of the benefit gained, its implications to our system of benefits as a whole, and the time and energy spent on conducting the effort, it would be an abuse or, perhaps, a misuse for the DAV Washington staff to initiate a nationwide grassroots effort.


Our system of veterans benefits and services is much better served by saving our knock-out punches for such issues as:

1. Preventing the downgrading of the VA's Schedule for Rating Disabilities and opposing any detrimental change in the definition of service connection.
2. Opposing the federal taxation, means testing or capping of VA disability compensation and service-connected death benefits.
3. Reforming the VA health care system or the claims and appeals process.
4. Obtaining adequate appropriations for the Department of Veterans Affairs.
5. Preserving the existence of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees.
6. Preserving the use of veterans' preference in federal employment.

Are these issues recognizable? They should be if you have been active in the DAV in recent years. Each and every one of these goals is vital to the preservation of an important aspect of our benefits system.

So the first rule of thumb to be understood is that the all-out grassroots effort should only be employed on a national scale when the issue is of fundamental importance. Localized grassroots efforts, those aimed at a single member of the House or Senate and restricted to a single Congressional district or state, or efforts to bring legislation to your member's attention and request his or her support would be exceptions to this rule.

Once it has been decided that a particular issue is of fundamental importance and that an all-out grassroots effort should be mobilized, there are several factors to



take into account that relate to the success or failure of the effort itself.

(1) Is the issue identifiable to our membership, that is, is it of such a nature that disabled veterans will definitely and readily perceive that it is important to them personally or to their fellow DAV members?

For example, several decades ago, in urging our membership to contact their elected officials in protest of legislation that would possibly subject VA benefits to federal taxation, there was no doubt in the minds of the national organization that our members would readily identify with this issue. With this realization, DAV commenced this particular effort with a feeling of confidence (that was later justified).

Another such example, which occurred in 2014, involved advance appropriations for the VA's non-health care budget. (Advance appropriation protecting the VA's health care budget was enacted in 2009.)

On Oct. 1, 2013, the government shut down when Congress was unable to pass a budget. Because health care funding had been approved a year in advance, veterans were able to continue their health care, but the Veterans Benefit Administration, the VA Cemetery system and the Board of Veterans' Appeals were all closed. Also in jeopardy were disability compensation, survivors benefits, pension and education benefits. If the government remained shut down, payments to veterans, their dependents and survivors would have been at risk. In 2014, DAV conducted an all-out grassroots campaign, *Operation: Keep the Promise*, to enact legislation to provide advance appropriations for all remaining VA budget authority. With the continued pressure by DAV members, Congress enacted and the president approved legislation to provide for advance appropriations for disability compensation, survivors benefits, pension and all education and vocational rehabilitation benefits—a big win for all veterans.

On the other hand, some issues are not readily identifiable to DAV members and don't impact many disabled veterans, but are so unfair and harmful that all-out action could be necessary. Such a situation happened decades earlier when both the House and Senate passed identical provisions in separate bills. The provision would have stopped disability compensation benefits to a mentally incompetent veteran rated

100-percent disabled, had an estate greater than \$25,000 and who had no spouse or dependent child. Many of these veterans were being cared for by parents, siblings or adult children who had been advised by the VA to save as much money as possible for the veteran in the future event that the family caregiver was no longer able to provide the care. While this provision did not impact many DAV members, and the vast majority of our members were not even aware of it, when it was brought to their attention, DAV and Auxiliary members responded overwhelmingly. In the end, the provision was removed before the legislation was passed.

The issue of preserving the five-point federal employment preference for non-disabled veterans is another case in point. DAV members, on the surface, would appear to have no "ax to grind" on this issue. However, if the five-point preference were taken away, quite possibly the 10-point preference for disabled veterans would soon have followed. Also, the elimination of any major veterans benefit was undesirable from the standpoint of the precedent it would have set for future veteran program cutback attempts.

The veterans' preference issue was presented in this light to DAV members across the country during our grassroots effort. The point was understood by our members, and we achieved a fine and prolonged involvement from them in this struggle.

(2) Is there sufficient time to wage an effective grassroots effort?

The time factor is an extremely important consideration to be taken into account in deciding whether it is possible to mount a successful grassroots campaign and what form the campaign should take.

If the national organization is going to engage and motivate our national membership and/or all DAV leaders throughout the country, experience has shown that, ideally, at least one week from date of initial contact must be allowed before it can be assumed that the vast majority of members have been informed. Then an additional one to two weeks are required before chapters and departments can begin their own organized actions—calling special meetings, planning strategy, etc. From this point, still another two weeks is required before the campaign reaches maximum strength.

From the above, you can see that the ideal situation should allow the Washington legislative staff a lead time of some four to five weeks from date of membership notification to the date the issue is voted upon by Congress.

If there is little or no lead time, the Washington office may be forced to initiate the effort through communications to certain DAV leaders to ensure the alert is received and understood. In these circumstances, asking for membership responses in the form of phone calls, emails and personal visits to legislators may be critical.

However, if the DAV department Benefits Protection Team Leader (BPTL)—formerly department legislative chairman—has established a strong Benefits Protection Program in the department and can reach out to chapter team leaders, the four- to five-week lead time can be cut in half and a strong grassroots effort can be accomplished quickly.

It is extremely important for team leaders to have contact information on chapter team leaders so that swift contact can be made with them and they can, in turn, reach out to their chapter members and other support in their network. (More will be discussed about building a strong Benefits Protection Team Network and the tools that can be used.)

A CALL TO ACTION

Once you have been called upon to help in a grassroots effort, what should you do?

Let's assume there is sufficient lead time for an all-out effort, and this important campaign involves U.S. senators and representatives in the House in support of a particular issue.


GET THE WORD OUT If a chapter meeting is scheduled coincident with the arrival of the legislative alert calling for a grassroots effort, certainly it should be placed on the chapter agenda and fully discussed by the chapter BPTL or the chapter commander or adjutant. If a regular meeting is not scheduled for some time, chapters should call special meetings. If this is not possible, all members should be individually advised via a special chapter alert mail out or, if necessary, telephone or email outreach. Social media such as Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn can be used for rapid dissemination of the alert.

Auxiliary units may or may not have received the same “call to arms” but, in any event, they very definitely should be encouraged to participate in any grassroots campaign effort. A coordinated, unified effort between DAV and Auxiliary members is essential. (See Section A, Building a Network of Networks.)



PERSONAL CONTACT Nothing is more effective in terms of getting the attention of your legislators than a personal visit to their local office. If at all possible, chapter officers and perhaps a delegation of members should contact the legislator's local office. Senators have several local offices throughout a state. Members of the House have at least one and several have more than one in their congressional districts. Check the telephone listing, online, or go to DAV CAN (Commander's Action Network) www.dav.org/can for the office location and number, and request an appointment to discuss the matter with the legislator's aide.

In addition to this official type of visit, it is effective for chapter members to arrange a schedule of visitations among themselves. Every day, two or three people can drop in at the local office of their legislator. You can be assured that if a local office suddenly has wall-to-wall DAV members or other constituents stopping in regularly, this fact will soon be relayed to the legislator in Washington. A top priority among all members of Congress is to know what is going on back in their own states and districts. (See Section B, Meeting Request; Section C, Guidelines for a Successful Meeting; and Section D, After the Meeting.)



EMAIL Over the years, and significantly because of the irradiation of all incoming surface mail, email has become an acceptable way to communicate with your legislator. DAV has made it convenient for people to send emails from the DAV website. All DAV and Auxiliary members and supporters are encouraged to sign up for DAV CAN (Commander's Action Network) to receive all our alerts and prepared emails. The alerts are emailed to you, and they explain what action needs to be taken and why. When you click the link in the alert, a prepared email will appear. The message can, and should, be edited to provide personal information on how this issue affects you or your family. Emails are a very convenient method to use when contacting your legislator, and DAV will keep you quickly informed of events that can impact your life as an injured veteran when you sign up to be a DAV CAN member. You need not be a member of DAV to join DAV CAN, so encourage your family, friends, neighbors and co-workers to join. (See Section E, Sample Emails.)

LETTERS Not everyone can visit their legislator's office, and some people may not have a personal computer or feel comfortable using one. However, almost everyone can take a few minutes to write a letter. The constituent letter is a very important personalized communicative link between elected officials and the people who have voted them into office.

Second only to standing "knee deep" in a large group of constituents, a large and steady volume of mail on a single issue can play a major part in influencing your legislator's voting decision.

Letters should be individually written. Avoid the use of a form letter, whenever possible. Form letters and even, to a degree, "petition" letters (one letter with numerous signatures) are widely regarded by legislators and their aides as being the result of a few determined people, rather than indicative of a broad groundswell of public opinion. Therefore, if you use a form letter, add something personal about how the issue affects you or a family member. Remember, the "numbers game" is what it's all about for your members of Congress. That is, each letter represents a vote, or several votes, during the next election cycle.

Please don't be abusive or antagonistic in your

letters. Members of Congress and their aides are people, too, and just like you and me, are not necessarily thrilled about the idea of doing something for people who are unpleasant.

Please be factual in your letters, and don't make wild or obviously false claims or statements. Besides, the cause of DAV—caring for our nation's ill and injured veterans, their families and survivors—can stand on its own without misrepresentation or distortion.

Write letters in your own words. Don't feel that you have to make the content of your letter conform, word for word, with the legislative alert or email you may have received or the speech you may have heard. Remember, we want to stay away from the "form letter" syndrome. If letters are too similar or identical in content, they may cause your legislator or aide to doubt their validity or sincerity. So, state your views in your own terms. Just use the correct bill number and important essentials, and your legislator will get the message.

The grassroots letter effort should not be a "flash in the pan," rather it should be steady and continuing. This means that your legislator should not receive 50 communications in one week and then nothing for the remainder of the month. A steady flow of letters for five continuous weeks would make a much more lasting impression on your legislator's mind.

Chapter members should therefore be encouraged to write follow-up letters in addition to their original correspondence, have their spouses and other family members write letters, "schedule" letters to be mailed on different days, etc. Use any legitimate means to ensure a continual flow of letters, thus keeping the issue active in the minds of your legislators.

When you send your letter to your legislator (via the Postal Service or other hand delivery; fax is okay), do not send it to the Washington office; it will be significantly delayed due to the mail screening process now in place. All letters should be sent to a local, state or district office address. Again, these addresses can be found online or on the DAV website. (See Section F, Sample Letters.)

TELEPHONE As a supplement to the personal visit and letter, place a call to your legislator to express your views and ask for action.

Every DAV member can place a phone call, both to the local office and to the Washington office of your legislator.

You may recall that the national organization designated a special day as “Phone the Hill Day” or “Phone to Action” in prior legislative battles. This tactic was most effective.

As in the case of writing letters, chapters should be encouraged to make up a schedule of phone calls to cover a fairly lengthy period. By having DAV and Auxiliary members, their families and friends place calls on different days, the impression can be made that a large number of people in the state or district have a keen interest on an issue.

It is important to note that these suggestions do not involve the use of deception or any tactics that are not open and above board. They are legitimate, effective means of communication which should be employed by DAV and Auxiliary members in support of our organization’s legislative goals.

GRASSTOPS In recent years, experts on advocacy have identified another element in a strong advocacy campaign. “Grasstops,” those individuals who have a personal or professional relationship with a legislator or his or her staff, can be friends, family members, neighbors, classmates, golf buddies, campaign volunteers or people who sit on a congressional advisory committee. Grasstops have direct access to the member of Congress or influential staff. Identifying and developing grasstops can significantly improve efforts to make our legislators aware of DAV issues. However, grasstops should be used sparingly, and only when the issue is of utmost importance to DAV and its members. Like the boy who cried wolf, you don’t want to abuse or overuse this relationship.

Building and engaging a corps of grasstop advocates is the most effective means of building momentum behind an important legislative position. Direct contact and an emotional connection is essential to gain notice. The power of individual, personal stories is a great value in making that emotional connection.

SOCIAL MEDIA During this decade, social media has become an important element in the day-to-day lives of many people, including members of Congress



and their staffs. According to a 2013 publication by National Journal, *The New Tools of Advocacy*, social media can play a powerful role in advocacy, as a supplement to traditional advocacy (pages 10–11). The article concluded that not only was this country’s population turning to social media for information (page 5), but so were members of Congress and their staffs. According to National Journal, as of July 2013, 93 percent of Congress was on Twitter (page 10). In conducting interviews with congressional chiefs of staff, National Journal was told, “We’ve definitely rethought a vote or taken a different angle on a bill based on what’s happening in social [media].” Another chief of staff said, “We listen primarily to what interest groups and leadership [are saying] in social media” (page 11).


If you are on Facebook or LinkedIn, post or share the DAV alert or share DAV’s Facebook posts on these issues.

If you tweet, retweet DAV’s message to your Twitter followers.

If you’re a blogger, copy the DAV alert to your site and post it.

These social networking techniques not only broadly spread the word on issues important to DAV, our members and supporters, but also create greater influence on elected officials to make the right choices in policies affecting veterans with disabling injuries. Truly, there is strength in numbers, so use the power of social networking to advance our cause and protect veterans’ rights.

It is important to learn how to use social media or, at least, find a chapter member who uses social media



who can support these efforts on the local level. DAV's Communications Department can help you with social media such as Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn. To reach the widest audience and members of Congress, it is important to post DAV alerts on your Facebook or LinkedIn home pages or to retweet a DAV message.

THE MEDIA Letters to the editor of your local newspaper are effective tools for getting the word out to citizens in your area, as well as to your elected officials. Letters to the editor get a lot of attention from members of Congress and their staffs, because the letters let them to know what their constituents want.

Letters to the editor should be short and well-written. They should be concise and draw upon personal experiences, without exaggeration. Your letter should reflect your conviction on the issue. If you are writing as a representative of the organization, you should sign it as a member of a chapter. You can inject personal information and experiences, but it is important that your opinion as a DAV leader is in keeping with DAV's official stance on an issue based on our convention resolutions. (See Section H, Sample Letters to the Editor.)

In the past, well-placed Op-Eds by DAV leaders have been very effective with helping us accomplish our goals. Op-Eds should be used for important legislative issues. Due to the heavy reliance on the VA for services and benefits by DAV members and the fact that DAV's national staff is heavily involved with the VA and understanding the problems faced by veterans in accessing VA benefits and services, DAV is respected for its subject matter expertise on the VA. DAV National Legislative and Communications staff can assist you in the construction and placement of Op-eds in important campaigns. (See Section I, Sample Op-Ed Articles.)

TOWN HALL MEETINGS When time permits, another way to educate your member of Congress and the American public is through town hall meetings scheduled by your elected officials. These meetings have a dual purpose: First, it is a means by which members of Congress let their constituents know what they are doing back in Washington; second, it informs them about the concerns of their


constituents. Similar to personal visits, if you have an opportunity to speak, be brief, have the facts, be confident, focus on the issue, and ask tactfully for their support.

Find out when your legislator will hold a town hall meeting in your area. Get together with a group of DAV members or others to attend the local town hall meeting. Choose a spokesperson who will address the most important DAV issues facing the disabled veterans in your area.

In addition to congressional town hall meetings, DAV departments and chapters can arrange for town hall meetings and invite local legislators to address issues important to our membership. It is important for the commander or his or her designee to open up the meeting with a brief discussion on the background of issues important to DAV members before introducing the legislator. The dual purpose of this town hall meeting is not only to hear from the legislator, but also to educate your legislator about our issues.

Election campaigns present another opportunity for holding a town hall meeting. During campaign season, candidates are very interested in appearing before groups of voters. It is important to keep in mind, as you will read below, DAV is nonpartisan and cannot endorse or oppose any candidate for public office. In addition, all candidates must be invited. If any of the candidates decline, you can still hold the town hall meeting with the remaining candidate(s). Since candidates may not want to appear with others, you should be flexible enough to hold one or more town hall meetings to accommodate all the candidates. It is important to inform the audience that all candidates were invited to attend and that "candidate A" declined or that "candidate B" will attend a town hall meeting at a future date. Again, town hall meetings during election season also serve the dual purpose of educating the legislator or candidate and hearing from them about their support for our issues. (See Section J, Invitation to Business Meeting, Town Hall Meeting or Social Event.)

COALITIONS There is strength in numbers, so you should constantly find new ways to develop and strengthen relationships with other organizations,



especially other service organizations in your area. By identifying, contacting and forging partnerships with other patriotic charities who share DAV's concerns on key issues, your campaign will broaden its perspective, enhance its credibility, expand its resources and out-organize any opposition or obstacles.

Tip O'Neill, the Massachusetts politician and longtime speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, once observed, "Power is the appearance of power." Coalitions represent large numbers of people; as such, they can provide that crucial appearance of power. Coalitions can also bring much-needed credibility and efficiency to organizing efforts.

The more diverse a coalition is, the more legitimate. Many coalitions exist mostly on paper and are made up of organizations that work on very similar issues. Once you've identified the groups you want to recruit, meet with them to educate them about all facets of the issue.

If your DAV department or chapter is part of a veterans' coalition, make the members of the coalition aware of the grassroots campaign and ask for their assistance. Some of their members might be affected by the issue and would appreciate finding out more about the issue and what they could do.

A coalition is a group of individuals and/or organizations with a common interest who agree to work together toward a common goal. That goal could be as narrow as obtaining adequate funding for VA health care or as broad as trying to reform the VA health care system to ensure veterans receive timely access to quality health care from the VA. Coalitions may be loose associations in which members work for a short time to achieve a specific goal and then disband, or they may become a more formal structure which continues to fight to better benefits and health care for veterans. They may draw from a local community, a region or a state (or even on a national level, like The Partnership for Veterans Health Care Budget Reform, which DAV formed with the American Legion, DAV's Independent Budget partners, MOAA and other national veteran or military service organizations). Regardless of their size or structure, they exist to create and support efforts to reach a particular set of goals.

In general, coalition goals may be as varied as

coalitions themselves. For our purposes, however, coalitions should focus on influencing or developing public policy on issues important to veterans, their families and survivors.

- In general terms, the coalition can concentrate the community's focus on a particular problem, create alliances among those who might not normally work together and keep the approach to veterans' issues consistent. Consistency can be particularly important in addressing our issues.
- A number of organizations and individuals together may have the resources to accomplish a task that none of them could have done singly.
- A unified community coalition can advocate for the issue more effectively than a number of disparate groups and individuals working alone. In addition, a wide-ranging coalition can bring to bear political pressure from all sectors of the community and wield a much larger amount of political power than just one organization.

There are a few ways to approach assembling a core group:

- Start with people you know. You may have lots of contacts, particularly among others concerned with veterans' issues. Use those contacts, either to pull them into the circle or to get the names of others who might be part of a core group. Someone who knows you, assuming you have a positive relationship, is usually more easily persuaded.
- Contact people in organizations and institutions most affected by the issue. Other local service organizations are the most likely contacts. VA employees might have an interest in the issue. Other local civic groups could be motivated to engage.
- Talk to influential people or people with lots of contacts. These may be business or civic leaders, ordinary citizens with high credibility or others who have influential networks, including elected officials and community leaders.

Make sure that lines of communication within the coalition, the media and the community are wide open. Open communication will assure that no one feels left out of the loop and that everyone has the information necessary to make coalition efforts



successful. Good communication with the media and the community will increase your chances for publicity and support when you need them.

Work at making the coalition a group in which anyone will feel welcome, and continue to invite people to join until your campaign ends successfully. Try to involve everyone in the coalition in planning and major decisions. The more people feel ownership of the coalition itself, the harder they will work to achieve the ultimate goal and the less likely they will be to allow turf issues or minor conflicts to get in the way of the coalition's efforts.

Finally, in addition to success itself, the celebration of success is a great way to cement the bonds among members of a coalition. Celebration of achievement will help the coalition thrive and will give you a much-needed opportunity to memorialize the effort you have made to secure DAV's goals.

MOBILE SERVICE OFFICES (MSO) It may appear strange to be discussing DAV's MSOs as part of the legislative process, but when time permits and when an MSO is in your area, it presents an excellent opportunity to educate your legislator and staff about what DAV is all about—empowering our nation's ill and injured veterans to lead high-quality lives with dignity and respect. Our service program is a major factor in how we accomplish our goal. Showcasing DAV's free services helps us in the legislative arena because it illustrates our commitment to our cause and demonstrates our right to ask for and receive legislation to assist in the accomplishment of our goals.

Past experience has demonstrated that legislators who are aware of and understand what DAV does to help disabled veterans, their families and survivors are more apt to support our legislative agenda.



"NONPARTISAN" POLITICAL ACTIVITY

While DAV certainly engages in political activity in promotion of our legislative programs and goals, it does not and must not engage in partisan politics.

That is to say, our organization is directly and indirectly involved in our nation's legislative process and its various operative mechanisms. We have varied and voluminous communications, contacts and dealings with elected government officials, all of which are regularly reported to our national membership. This is political activity, and it is perfectly legal and justifiable that we engage in such activity.

However, in pursuit of our legislative objectives, the DAV never publicly takes a position wherein we officially endorse or oppose one candidate for public office over another, nor do we ever give any indication of preference for one political party over another. This would be partisan political activity, which is forbidden by federal law governing our tax-exempt status and in our own Constitution and Bylaws. Also, because of the differing party affiliations and political views of our members, partisanship within our organization would be divisive.

VIOLATION OF OUR CONGRESSIONAL CHARTER AND CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS Public Law 72-186, approved June 17, 1932, is the federal law which incorporated and granted the congressional charter to the "Disabled American Veterans of the World War." Public Law 77-668, approved July 15, 1942, amended the original act, changing our organization's name to "Disabled American Veterans."

In Section 6 of both of these statutes appear the following words:

"That the organization shall be non-political, non-sectarian, as an organization shall not promote the candidacy or any persons seeking public office."

In this same vein, Article 2, Section 2.1, of the DAV Bylaws states, in part:

"This organization shall be non-political and non-sectarian and the name of this organization or name of any subdivision thereof shall not be used in representing the desires or wishes of its membership

in any political, sectarian or labor dispute."

VIOLATION OF INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Under the laws and regulations governing the Internal Revenue Service (Title 26, U.S.C.), the federal tax-exempt status of certain charitable, nonprofit organizations (including DAV) shall be withheld or removed if they:

"Participate or intervene, directly or indirectly in any political campaign on behalf or in opposition to any candidate for public office...Activities which constitute participation or intervention in a political campaign in behalf of or in opposition to a candidate include, but are not limited to, the making of oral or written statements on behalf of or in opposition to such a candidate."

In view of the above, all DAV members must be acutely aware that not only is partisan political activity statutorily forbidden, but if engaged in, it could mean the revocation of our congressional charter and/or the removal of our federal tax-exempt status.

Therefore, the national organization, state departments and chapters cannot endorse or oppose the candidacy of any individual for public office, nor can any of the above or an individual claiming to represent the views of the above engage in activity which could be construed as partisan political activity.

The most common type of "violation" which could occur (in fact, has occurred) at the local level would be a DAV department or chapter passing a resolution, mailing out a bulletin or making some form of public statement indicating that its membership supports or opposes the candidacy of a particular individual. At times, individual DAV department and chapter officials (and members) have taken it upon themselves to engage in partisan politics, using the name of DAV.

If and when partisan political violations occur, they should immediately be brought to the attention of department and chapter officials who should take appropriate action—direct that such activity cease and, depending upon existing circumstances, contact the DAV inspector general at national headquarters or issue a public disclaimer which "disassociates" the organization from the action taken. (Use your best judgment after speaking to the DAV inspector general as to whether a public disclaimer would just



bring more “attention” to the violation.)

It should be pointed out that it is possible for DAV to “walk the fine line” which separates political activity from political partisan activity.

If a department or chapter wishes to publicly acknowledge the “beneficial work” of a legislator or the “nonsupport” of a legislator relative to DAV goals, then by all means such action is encouraged. But care must be given not to editorialize, not to accompany your words of praise or dismay with language that very definitely suggests that the legislator be retained or removed from public office.

Examples of political activity which are nonpartisan include:

1. Honoring a legislator with a department or national award or citation.
2. During an election year, inviting both candidates for a public office to address an “open” DAV meeting.
3. Individual communications to legislators (letters, emails, phone calls, etc.) which simply inform them that a course of action taken is or is not appreciated. (Your DAV membership can be stated.)

Finally, it should be noted that none of these prohibitions regarding partisan politics should be construed to mean that DAV members, in accordance with their rights as private citizens, should not engage in partisan political activity. The sole concern should be that the national organization and its affiliates are not “compromised” by a member’s partisan political activity. As long as this does not occur, then by all means, active involvement in our country’s democratic process by individual DAV members should be encouraged.

DIVISIVENESS Even if DAV was not precluded from engaging in partisan politics by our congressional charter, bylaws and federal statutes, as stated above, there is another very good reason why such activity should be foreign to us—it would be extremely divisive to us internally.

The personal political persuasion of individual DAV and Auxiliary members, most assuredly, covers the broad spectrum of political party membership and philosophy. On any occasion, when DAV members gather from across the country, you will find

Democrats, Republicans and Independents as well as conservatives, liberals and moderates of all stripes. Despite these differences, all will be working together, socializing together, planning the future path of our organization together—without so much as a fleeting thought concerning the party affiliation of their fellow DAV members.

Just think of that for a second: thousands of DAV members together for five to six days at a national convention, all definitely engaged in political activity relating to our organization, its programs and goals, and yet not engaged in partisan politics!

How many times has the personal political preference of candidates for DAV elected national offices been an issue at a national convention, or what DAV member has ever objected to having “Congressman Doe” speak at a national or department convention for reasons related to the legislator’s party affiliation?

Neither has ever occurred, for we in DAV are not concerned whether our national commander is a Democrat or Republican. We also are not concerned about which political party claims the allegiance of Congressman Doe. What we care about is that our national commander is the best person to lead our organization and that Congressman Doe is, or has the potential to be, an advocate for veterans, especially those injured in service, in the U.S. Congress.

Being politically “color blind” gives us cohesiveness, unity and singleness of purpose. This solidarity is one of the great strengths of our organization, which enables us to successfully achieve our goals. DAV does not want or need the divisiveness that would accompany the injection of partisan political activity in our affairs.

It is hoped that this information has provided a good, broad overview of DAV and its involvement with the legislative process. It is also hoped that this information has made the point concerning DAV rank and file membership participation in our organization’s legislative efforts. Such participation is vital and necessary if DAV is to continue to effectively represent the interests of America’s injured and ill veterans, their dependents and survivors.