

After Action Report on 2026 DAV National Convention in Orlando

Bob Sanchez and Mark McHugh attended the conference for Jack Fisher Chapter 23. Bob preceded Q by a day due to a schedule conflict. Comments specific to each annotated by a “B” for Sanchez and a “Q” for McHugh below. Sessions available on video so marked:

John Donovan was unanimously elected as the new National Commander. Commander Donovan is from Chapter 10 in Conway, Arkansas. His bio is on dav.org website.

Several conference sessions have been posted to YouTube which can be accessed from <https://www.dav.org/news-media/videos/> under the 2026 National Convention header.

Found the Inspector General and Communications and Outreach seminars particularly interesting and informative, and both are worth the full watch.

SESSIONS ATTENDED

B: DAV National Executive Committee session – introduction of the NEC members.

B: MyDAV.org/Membership Portal Training – Members can enter this portal and learn about the different areas they can explore.

B: District 16 Meeting – California chapters met and introduced themselves. Session included Q&A session where a number of chapters posted great questions for the board. Several were obviously not happy with the board or its answers.

B: American Battle Monuments Commission – responsible for all war monuments outside the U.S. Also had a booth in exhibits area.

B: Golden Corral – spoke with GC representatives about how we and others can continue to support them; mentioned our annual Christmas Party and Forget-Me-Nots.

B/Q: DAV/DAVA Joint Opening Session (video) – Commanders Nee and Pierce gave their reports and Rules of the Convention were promulgated.

B: Service and Legislative Seminar (video) – discussion about ongoing and active legislation in the congressional pipe. Notably H.R. 1039 and 1286, Clear Communications for Veterans Act and Simplifying Forms for Veterans Claims Act respectively will require VA to:

- 1) Implement evidence-based recommendations to enhance clarity, usability and outcomes for Veterans
- 2) Consults with VSOs to ensure reforms reflect the needs and experiences of the Veteran community

The PACT Act of 2022 – the largest expansion of toxic exposure benefits in decades; added dozens of presumptive conditions; expanded access to care.

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H.R. 5339 Susan E. Lukas 9/11 Servicemembers Fairness Act

S.B. 2220/H.R. 4675 Fighting for the Overlooked Recognition of Groups Operating in Toxic Test Environments in Nevada (FORGOTTEN) Veterans Act

Q: DAVA First Business Session (video) – discussed general business of the Auxiliary including their ongoing efforts, growth and potential way forward

Q: Memorial Service – honoring those left behind, and those lost this past year

Q: DAVA Q&A Session – asked about our own experience with standing up a DAVA unit associated with Chapter 23. From that question, I discovered that DAVA National was unaware of our difficulties with obtaining the necessary permissions and charity certifications, and obtained the contacts we need to be approaching to hopefully reignite the drive to stand up DAVA Unit 23 in Anaheim. Regarding the bureaucracy, there is a lot DAVA does so that we don't have to.

Q: Hospital & Voluntary Services Session (video) – discussed general topics specific to area

Q: Inspector General Seminar (video) – addressed several issues routinely encountered in paperwork and other Chapter inspection issues.

Q: Communications and Outreach Seminar (video) – spoke to several initiatives on DAVs part to reach historically under-contacted communities and geographies.

B: Ibogaine-Assisted Therapy: Hope Evidence and the Road Ahead Seminar (video) – Americans for Ibogaine is an advocacy to inform state legislatures, Congress and the VA of the value of this treatment to support/help Veterans with PTSD.

Q: POW/MIA Seminar (video) – addressed current and recent efforts to identify and repatriate those missing from past wars

B/Q: Voluntary Services Seminar (video) – the importance of volunteering through the DAV, the VA and other VSOs.

B: DAV Employment and Entrepreneurship Seminar (video) – Angel Torres CEO spoke on starting a business and addressed troubles Veterans experience starting their business. veteranengagement.org

B/Q: Fun Night – performance by husband-and-wife Veteran duo, *The War and Treaty*, the 2023 Academy of Country Music Award Duo of the Year.

B/Q: DAV Second and Final Business Sessions (videos)

B/Q: Introduction of National Officers Dinner – intro of new national commander and newly elected board members.

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EXHIBIT HALL

Several vendors were represented in the Exhibits Area including:

- American Battle Monuments Commission** – worldwide listing of monuments
- American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial** – avdlm.org/#virtualtour
- Assure Cardiac Recovery Systems** – modern wearable for men & women
- CaptionCall** – no-cost caption phone service for hard-of-hearing
- Cornerstone Caregiving** – in-home resource for life function assistance
- Defense POW/MIA Accountability Agency** – searching for 81,000+ unaccounted
- Delta Dental** – VA coordinated dental health insurance
- Florida for Ibogaine** – advocating psychedelic treatments for PTSD/TBI
- Golden Corral** – Veterans’ Day and Camp Corral information
- Heroes with Hearing Loss** – caption phones at low- or no-cost
- Honor Alert** – emergency alert buttons and wristbands including fall detection
- Liberty Honor Alert** – instant emergency alert system enabling self-sufficiency
- Live Well Homecare** – in-home resource for life function assistance
- LogicMark** – alert pendants and wristbands based on Apple Watch platform
- National Cemetery Administration** – Veteran’s Legacy Memorial and memorials
- Oracle** – VA Health Record Modernization, what it means/will do
- USAA** – aside from usual insurance offerings, final expense life insurance
- The Veterans Consortium** – pro bono legal services

NOTE: *Brochures and fliers for most of the vendors above available, but please take photos of them if interested as there are mostly individual copies of each.*

All four of the VA’s Compensation and Pension (C&P) Examination contractors were represented in the Exhibits Hall, and all parked their mobile examination clinics outside as well: Optum Serve, VES, QTC and Loyal Source showed off their abilities to reach remote locales with examination resources. This is particularly important in light of the VA’s ongoing efforts to reach historically underserved Indigenous Americans in the more remote areas of the contiguous states and Alaska.

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LESSONS LEARNED

- 1) Register early to ensure you stay at the venue, *not* the overflow hotel. Transport in between can be on a highly varied and poorly advertised schedule, and sticky hot (Orlando in August, duh). Had to Uber three times to get in between hotels.
- 2) Received no advance warning about the now widely accepted practice of swapping state convention pins (a la Disney) at the national conferences. Should anyone wish to participate in this ritual, it will of course require that you pack a healthy supply of your own state pins, or perhaps anything else trade-worthy. We were mostly content to merely observe.
- 3) Pack earplugs. Q left the “Fun Night” musical performance with a screaming headache. Pretty sure the sound guy has hearing loss . . . Ironical.
- 4) New DAV motto is “Keeping Our Promise to American Veterans” meaning our shirt and business card templates need to be updated.
- 5) Conference was very informative and many promising contacts made, (noted many more being made by those engaged in pin exchange). Highly recommend Chapter continue to send attendees.