

## Leave No Veteran Behind: A 75-Year Legacy of Service

Distinguished legislators and honored guests:

Good morning. I stand before you today as the Commander of Disabled American Veterans Chapter 1 here in New Mexico. This year, our chapter proudly celebrates 75 years of continuous service to our state's heroes. For three-quarters of a century, Chapter 1 has stood as a beacon of support. We are an organization of veterans helping veterans. We understand the unique challenges of transition, the wounds of war, and the quiet struggles our heroes face when the uniform comes off.

Our mission has never changed: to leave no veteran behind.

But government agencies cannot do this work alone, and neither can local chapters. True success requires a bridge. It requires a partnership between a trusted, 75-year-old grassroots institution and the legislative and financial power you control. Today, I want to share how Chapter 1 is actively serving New Mexico's veterans, and how we can work together to strengthen that safety net.

### Lifeline Programs: Food, Honor, and Mobility

When we talk about leaving no veteran behind, we must start with basic human needs.

First, we tackle food insecurity through our community food drive. We open our doors to all veterans and their families who need a helping hand. There is no stigma. They are met by peers who look them in the eye, thank them for their service, and hand them the groceries they need.

Second, we heal the soul. To fight isolation, we partner with the Southwest Valor Quilters. Once a month, we donate a custom, handmade quilt to a local veteran. When we drape that quilt over their shoulders, we are telling them, "We see you, you are valued, and you are home."

Third, we ensure our veterans can actually access the healthcare they earned. Rural healthcare access is a massive challenge in New Mexico. Veterans cannot get better if they cannot get to the doctor. That is why Chapter 1 runs a dedicated transportation program.

We saw a critical need, and our local communities answered the call. Thanks to the incredible generosity and grassroots fundraising of the people in Silver City and Bayard,

we raised the funds to purchase a dedicated DAV van. This van is a mobile lifeline. It transports our veterans to and from their medical appointments at various regional medical locations, completely free of charge.

## The Call to Collaboration: How Government Can Partner

Legislators, the work we do is agile, immediate, and trusted. Silver City and Bayard proved that our communities have the heart to support veterans. But grassroots fundraising can only go so far. To ensure no veteran is left behind, local trust must be paired with government capability. We are on the front lines, but we need you to reinforce our supply lines.

We ask local, state, and federal agencies to champion our cause

- **Inter-Agency Coordination:** Help us connect with the state Department of Veterans' Services to locate isolated veterans who need rides or food drives.
- **Legislative Advocacy:** Keep veteran healthcare transit, food security, and mental health at the forefront of your legislative agenda.

## Conclusion

Imagine a veteran in our community. Because of Silver City and Bayard, they have a safe ride to their doctor. When they return, they receive a heavy box of groceries, and a beautifully stitched Southwest Valor Quilt is placed over their shoulders. In that moment, that veteran is mobile, they are fed, they are warm, and they are honored.

That is what community looks like.

DAV Chapter 1 has fought for that moment for 75 years. We will never stop showing up for New Mexico's veterans, but we need you to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with us. Let us combine the heartbeat of our local chapter with the resources of your offices. Together, we can fulfill our sacred duty to leave no veteran behind.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless our veterans.