

## *Disabled American Veterans*

What you should know about  
Grassroots Lobbying

*“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*

## *What is Grassroots Lobbying?*

Grassroots Lobbying Involves:

- Knowing the facts
- Contacting your elected officials
- Presenting your viewpoint

## *Why is Grassroots Lobbying Important?*

Because government must know your wishes before it can respond to them. Grassroots lobbying is simply the art of communicating with your elected officials.

As a consumer, taxpayer, disabled veteran, and citizen, you’ve got the power. You can use it effectively—if you know how.

## *How You Can Influence Legislation*

## *Be Informed*

Legislators respond to the power of informed opinion. The more you know about an issue, the easier you’ll catch your legislator’s attention, and the more influence you’ll have.

## *Express Your Views*

Always keep in mind that your lawmakers are elected to represent your interests. They need to stay in touch with you—or face the prospect of losing their jobs at reelection time. Likewise, you need to stay in touch with your elected officials—or live with legislation that doesn't represent your views.

## *Organize Opinion*

In politics, strength lies in numbers. No elected official can afford to ignore the weight of public opinion. As a grassroots lobbyist, you can:

- engineer a publicity campaign
- join a group of people who share your views about an issue—the DAV is such a group.

## *Vote!!!*

Above all, vote. It's your best bet for protecting democratic freedoms, and your constitutional guarantee that your rights and opinions are taken into consideration.

So take the right to vote seriously. Make sure you're registered to vote.

Learn the candidates' positions on the issues that are important to you.

## *How to Write Your Representatives*

Some Tips for Effective  
Grassroots Letter-Writing

## *Be Confident*

Many people believe their letters and e-mail to Congress aren't ever read. This simply is not true. You can be certain your letter or e-mail will be read by an aide or the representative—and answered.

While the U.S. mail is still a good way to stay in touch with elected officials at any level—federal, state, county, or local—e-mail is gaining in popularity over “snail mail.”

## *Be Brief*

Boil your argument down to a few paragraphs or less—any longer and your message loses effectiveness. Include any detailed information, such as a related article or report, with your letter, or as an attachment to your e-mail.

## *Examples*

Dear Senator Craig:

As your constituent, I write to urge you to support S. 50, a bill to make VA health care funding mandatory.

## *Examples*

Dear Representative Buyer:

As your constituent, I write to call your attention to the enclosed PTF report on health care for our nation's veterans.

## *Personalize Your Message*

State your views in your own words, or add your personal experience to a prepared form letter or e-mail.

Studies show that 15 personal letters are as effective as 200 standard form letters

## *Personalize Your Message — Example*

Dear Senator Craig:

As your constituent, I am writing to draw your attention to the need for mandatory funding for veterans health care.

I have a very difficult time accessing VA health care in my area because of excessive waiting times at my VA hospital.

## *Have the Facts*

The more facts you know, the better. Refer to bills by title or number. Cite experts, when needed, to back you up.

## *Have the Facts — Example*

According to the President's Task Force to Improve Health Care Delivery for Our Nation's Veterans, the gap between funding needs and actual funding is continually growing. This problem would be solved by making VA health care a mandatory program.

## ***Focus on One Issue***

Your message will be given the attention it deserves if you speak out on only one issue at a time.

## ***Focus on One Issue — Example***

Dear Representative Buyer:

As your constituent and a disabled veteran, I realize there are many challenges facing disabled veterans today. However, I would like to call your attention to the need for mandatory funding for veterans health care.

## ***Be Direct***

Tell your representative what action you want him or her to take, such as:

- introduce legislation
- cosponsor a bill
- vote for (or against) a bill in committee or on the floor.

If possible, get his or her commitment to do what you ask.

## ***More Examples***

Dear Senator Craig:

As your constituent, I write to ask you to introduce legislation to increase the face value for VA insurance for disabled veterans.

Please let me know if I can count on you to introduce this important legislation.

## ***More Examples***

Dear Representative Buyer:

As your constituent, I write to ask you to cosponsor and actively support H.R. 2318, a bill to make veterans health care a mandatory program.

Please let me know if you will cosponsor and support this legislation.

## ***More Examples***

Dear Senator Craig:

As your constituent, I write to ask you to vote for H.R. 0000 when it comes to the floor for a vote.

Please let me know if I can count on your vote.

## ***Be Civil***

Don't threaten, insult, joke,  
or name-call

## ***Be Timely***

Keep your messages timely so your  
legislator can act effectively on your  
behalf.

## ***Be Effective***

- To be most effective, write only to your own elected officials.  
— when legislators receive letters or e-mails from non-constituents, they are ignored or filtered out completely.
- If you write to a House or Senate Leader, their office will direct your mail to your own elected official.
- Mail with no return address is not routed to the member.

## ***Some More Points to Remember***

- Due to increased security on Capitol Hill, paper mail is not as effective as it used to be. Many offices are severely restricting postal mail.
- To increase effectiveness of direct postal mail, send them to Representatives' district offices and Senators' state offices.

## ***Compliment!***

—*The Most Overlooked and Under Utilized Tool*

Always praise your legislator, if he or she votes the way you wish. A note of thanks will be appreciated and remembered.

If he or she is already a cosponsor of a bill, thank them, and urge them to work towards passing the legislation through Congress.

## ***How To Visit Your Representative***

Some Tips for an Effective Office Visit

### ***Make an Appointment***

- Call or write your representative's home office. You can also contact his or her Washington, DC office by calling the U.S. Capitol switchboard at 1-202-224-3121 or 1-202-225-1094 (TTY). To get the number of a specific Representative or Senator, visit [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) or [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)
- Ask a staff member to arrange a time and place, either in Washington, DC or in your legislator's home district.

### ***Be Prepared***

- Know who you are visiting:
  - What veteran related bills have they introduced.
  - Are they cosponsors of key measure.
  - What is their voting record on veteran legislation.
- Know what you want to say. Emphasize how the issue affects you, the veterans community, and your state.
- Present your views politely but persuasively.
- Use relevant facts and research to support your views.
- If possible, bring an expert on the subject to support your views.

### ***Be On Time***

Make certain you reach your appointment on time, or a few minutes early.

*"If you leave to get there early, you will be on time.*

*If you leave to get there on time, you will be late."*

### ***Be Confident***

Focus on the issue—let your enthusiasm and concern win out over any shyness.

### ***Be Firm***

Find out exactly where your representative stands on the issue. Ask what action he or she intends to take. Don't be afraid to press for specifics.

### ***Be Brief***

Since legislators have busy schedules, plan on getting your message across in 5 minutes—10 at the very most. Don't get sidetracked into small talk—make your time really count.

### ***Listen Carefully***

Be ready to answer questions. If you don't know the answer to a question, admit it—and send the answer later. Ask the National Legislative Staff for help.

Listen carefully to your representative's viewpoint—even if you disagree.

### ***Follow Up***

- Send a thank-you letter to your representative and to the staff member who helped arrange your visit.
- Also include a summary of your position plus any other new information that supports your views.

### ***Other Ways You Can Express Your Views***

- Invite your Representative to visit your Chapter/Department
- Visit staff members regularly. By developing a cooperative relationship with staff members, you'll be a more effective lobbyist
- Conduct veterans Town Hall meetings and invite your elected officials

### ***Other Ways You Can Express Your Views***

- Send a message by e-mail, telegram, or Mail
- Send a Letter to the Editor of your local newspaper
  - Be concise. Keep your letter to one typed page
  - Draw on personal experience to support your views
  - Don't exaggerate your case
  - Be firm, but not hostile. Sign your full name.

### ***Where Can I Get More Information About Congress?***

- ***Congressional Quarterly***
  - Weekly reports on legislation (check your local public library)
- ***Congressional Directory***
  - names and addresses of members of Congress and their key staff aides ([www.gpoaccess.gov/crecord](http://www.gpoaccess.gov/crecord)).
- ***Congressional Record***
  - texts of congressional speeches ([www.gpoaccess.gov/crecord](http://www.gpoaccess.gov/crecord)).



The newest “wave” in grassroots lobbying is known as cyber advocacy.

Members of Congress (as well as state and local legislators) are using e-mail communications more and more as a way to stay in touch with the needs of their constituents.

## DAV Web Site

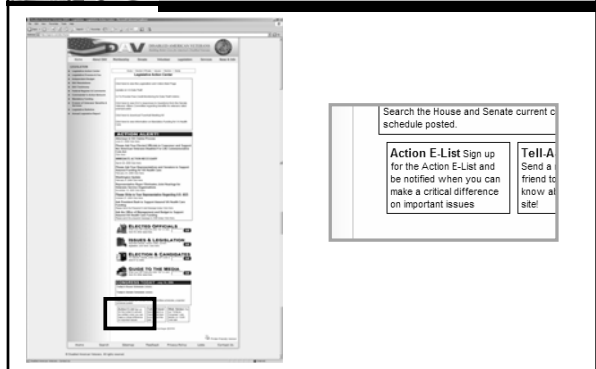
The “*Legislative Action Center*” on DAV’s web site at [www.dav.org](http://www.dav.org) is also an excellent resource for staying informed about veterans’ issues. There you will find:

- Action E-List
- DAV CAN
- Legislative alerts and prepared e-mail messages
- Elected Officials Section
- Key Votes

## Legislative Action Center

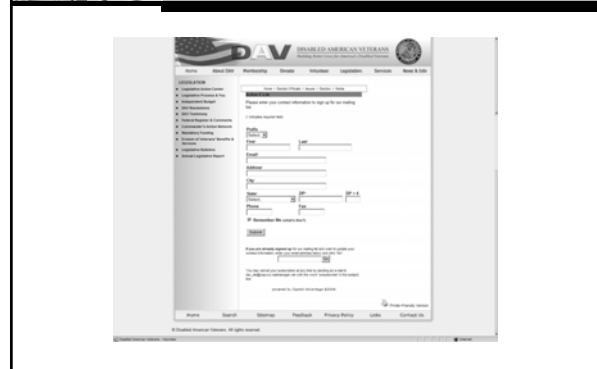


## Action E-List

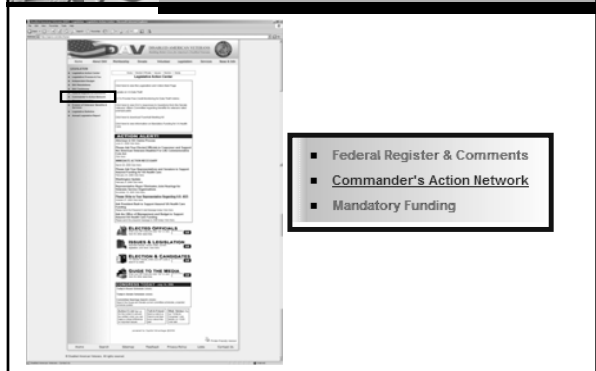


## Action E-List (cont'd)

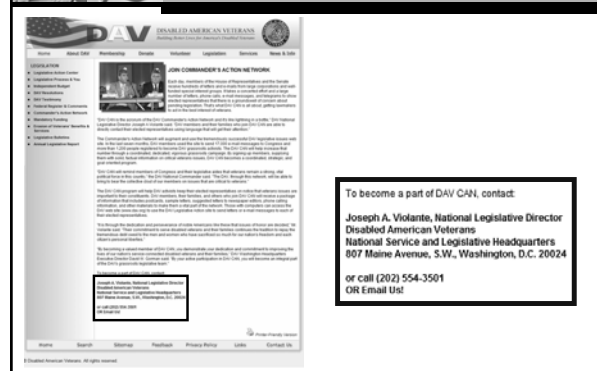
—signing up



## DAV Commanders Action Network



## DAV Commanders Action Network





## DAV Commanders Action Network

To become a part of DAV CAV, contact:

Joseph A. Volante, National Legislative Director  
Disabled American Veterans  
National Service and Legislative Headquarters  
1875 Wilson Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20024

Call (202) 531-3561  
(Email Us)

The screenshot shows the 'DAV FEEDBACK PAGE' form. A dropdown menu is open, listing various categories for feedback: Select A Subject, Member Change of Address, Claims/Service Assistance, Contributions/Planned Giving, Comments about the site, DAV Auxiliary, **DAV CAN**, DAV Magazine, Direct Mail Fund Raising, Education/Employment, and Return Address Label Inquiries. The 'DAV CAN' option is highlighted.

## Legislative alerts...

The screenshot shows a list of legislative alerts. A box highlights the 'ATTORNEYS IN VA CLAIMS PROCESS' alert, which includes a 'Click Here' link.

**ACTION ALERT!**  
Attorneys in VA Claims Process  
June 21, 2006 Click Here

Please Ask Your Elected Officials to Cosponsor and Support the American Veterans Disabled For Life Commemorative Coin Act  
Click Here

**IMMEDIATE ACTION NECESSARY**  
March 26, 2006 Click Here

Please Ask Your Representatives and Senators to Support Assured Funding for VA Health Care  
February 23, 2006 Click Here

**Washington Update**  
February 9, 2006 Click Here

Representative Buyer Eliminates Joint Hearings for Veterans Service Organizations  
November 10, 2005 Click Here

Please Write to Your Representative Regarding H.R. 4025  
October 27, 2005 Click Here

Ask President Bush to Support Assured VA Health Care Funding  
Please Send the Prepared E-mail Message Today! Click Here

Ask the Office of Management and Budget to Support Assured VA Health Care Funding  
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## Elected Officials Section

—directions to webpage

The screenshot shows the 'Elected Officials Section' page. A box highlights the 'Elected Officials' link in the navigation menu.

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**Legislative Acti**

## Elected Officials Section

## Key Votes

—directions to webpage

Home • Elected Officials • **Issues** • Election • Media

**Legislative Action Center**

**ISSUES & LEGISLATION**  
Important issues, recent votes, current legislation, and more. Click here. **GO**

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## Key Votes Webpage

—DAV position on legislation

Bill Number	DAV Position
Passed Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, FY2006 (H.R. 2006)	✓
Agreed To Murray Amnd. No. 1032 As Amended, Department of the Interior Appropriations Act, FY2006 (S. 2006)	✓
Agreed To Senate-House Joint Amnd. No. 1011, Department of the Interior Appropriations Act, FY2006 (S. 2006)	✓
Rejected Alaska Amnd. No. 140, Budget Resolution, FY2006 (H.R. 2006)	✗
Agreed To Budget Amnd. No. 170, Budget Resolution, FY2006 (H.R. 2006)	✓

## Key Votes of your Elected Representatives

—directions

Enter ZIP Code to see how your rep voted **GO**

## Key Votes of your Elected Representatives

Key Votes	Senate Votes				House Votes	
	Y	N	score	Y	score	
Rejected Thun Amnd. No. 3704: To provide, with an offset, \$20,000,000 for the Department of Veterans Affairs for medical facilities (S. 2006)	N	X	N	X		
Agreed To Alaska Amnd. No. 3842 as amended, To provide an additional \$430,000,000 for the Department of Veterans Affairs for medical services for outpatient care and treatment for veterans (H.R. 2006)	Y	✓	Y	✓		
Rejected Blumenthal Amnd. No. 3141: To provide an assured stream of funding for veteran's health care (H.R. 2006)	Y	✓	Y	✓		
Disjointed Amnd. No. 1007: To increase the National Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2006 (H.R. 2006)	Y	✓	Y	✓		
Passed Veterans Benefits Improvement Act (H.R. 2006)	Y	✓	Y	✓		
Failed National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007 (H.R. 2006)	Y	✓	Y	✓		
Failed Melancon of Louisiana Amendment, Military Quality of Life and VA Appropriations, FY2006 (S. 2006)	Y	✓	Y	✓		
Passed Congressional Budget for FY 2006 (H.R. 2006)	N	✓	N	✓		



## *“Cyber Advocacy”*

### *– A Caution*

While e-mail advocacy is steadily growing in importance and effectiveness, it seems certain that it will never replace a phone call or personal visit, which are some of the most valuable ways you can convey your views to your representatives. The DAV suggests using e-mail advocacy as a way to **supplement** your other lobbying efforts.

## *How to Develop a Working Relationship With Staff*

### *Develop a Working Relationship With Staff*

Three types of congressional staff:

- 1) District or state office staff
  - Live and work in Congressional district
  - Schedule members' local meetings
  - Deal with community issues
  - Do most of constituent assistance services
- 2) Washington staff
  - More direct involvement in legislative process
  - Extremely busy—work long hours
  - Each staffer has a portfolio of issues

### *Develop a Working Relationship With Staff*

Three types of congressional staff (cont'd):

- 3) Committee Staff
  - Three main types of committees, subcommittees:
    - Authorization**—develop authorizing legislation
    - Appropriations**—divide up money in federal budget
    - Oversight**—oversee implementation of programs

### *Develop a Working Relationship With Staff*

Committee staff:

- Duties include
  - Expertise in legislation (or appropriations/ budget) under committee's jurisdiction
  - Develop legislation to implement public policy goals

### *Develop a Working Relationship With Staff*

- At local level, you will probably work more with district staff
- Deal with them on routine matters, such as our legislative goals, our views on pending bills, etc.
- For calls to action from National Legislative staff and urgent matters, may be more effective to deal with Washington staff because they are closer to legislative action
- Committee staff are not generally as accessible to public

### ***Develop a Working Relationship With Staff***

Things you should know about members' district and Washington staff:

- Inexperienced
- Few experts on issues
  - Senate—62% of legislative aides in job 2 years or less
  - House—78% of legislative aides in job 2 years or less
- You can become a valuable source of information on veterans' issues and thus develop a good rapport

### ***Effectiveness and Courtesy as a Grassroots Lobbyist***

- Remember always that you are an ambassador for disabled veterans
- Be committed, be persuasive, be persistent, but be polite—even to a member who voted against us

### ***Effectiveness and Courtesy as a Grassroots Lobbyist***

- Be mindful that legislation often requires compromise by congressional members
  - If everyone insisted on having it all his or her way the system would not work: paralysis would result
  - Politicians represent citizens with different positions and goals and forge citizens' compromises

### ***Effectiveness and Courtesy as a Grassroots Lobbyist***

- Be mindful that legislation often requires compromise by congressional members
  - Sometimes, we have to accept less than we want; large legislative goals often can only be achieved incrementally—if we can't get the whole loaf, we accept half a loaf rather than get nothing

### ***An Effective Grassroots Lobby Means:***

- We have issues that are important and compelling enough to make people willing to become involved.
- To be motivated, committed, confident, persuasive, and effective, those people must have knowledge about the importance and justification for the action urged.

### ***An Effective Grassroots Lobby Means:***

- We must maintain favorable public opinion and strong public support for veterans' programs
- We need favorable media coverage
- We must have an effective leadership and communications structure in place to coordinate and guide the campaign

### ***Leadership and Communications***

DAV Legislative Staff is responsible for:

- Keeping abreast of developments
- Formulating strategies
- Initiating calls to action
- Communicating
- Guiding the effort
- Monitoring effectiveness

### ***Leadership and Communications***

Benefits Protection Team Leaders:

- Communicate call to action to grassroots
- Lead the grassroots campaign at Department and Chapter level
- Coordinate and facilitate effort

### ***Most Important***

We must have a large and reliable group of DAV and Auxiliary members who participate in our grassroots campaigns

### ***To Congratulate or Thank a Member for a Particular Vote, Cosponsorship, or Support:***

Examples:

As your constituent, I write to express my sincere appreciation for your vote in support of H.R. ....

As Commander of DAV Chapter 10 in [city],[state], I write to convey our members' gratitude for your support of S. 0000.

### ***To express disapproval of a vote or action:***

Examples:

I strongly disapprove of your vote....

I am most concerned about your support of...

### ***State Reasons why the legislator should support or oppose a bill.***

Examples:

This bill will bring fairness to the veterans health care appropriations process...

***End the Letter with:***

A thank you for the legislator's consideration, time, interest, support, or efforts

Examples:

I appreciate your consideration of my views.  
Thank you for taking the time to consider my views.

***End the Letter with:***

Examples (cont'd):

I appreciate your interest in this issue and your continuing support for our Nation's veterans.

Again, on behalf of disabled veterans in [state or congressional district if you're writing as a Department or Chapter Commander], I write to express our gratitude for your good work in gaining support for and achieving passage of H.R. 0000

