

Senator Durbin

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Raymond E. Dempsey Introduction

Joint Session of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees

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Chairmen Filner and Akaka, and Ranking Members Buyer and Burr, thank you for this opportunity to introduce Ray Dempsey, the National Commander of the Disabled American Veterans.

The son of a World War II veteran, Commander Dempsey was born and raised in Chicago. In 1967, shortly after graduating from high school, he enlisted in the United States Air Force.

Three years later, at just 21 years old, Commander Dempsey suffered a spinal cord injury while serving on a nuclear, biological, and chemical team.

He was initially paralyzed from the neck down and spent ten months in the hospital at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio.

While recovering at Wright-Pat, Commander Dempsey was introduced to the DAV by his father's friend at his hospital bed. He became a member in 1970, before he was medically discharged.

Commander Dempsey began a new career -- as an educator -- after his discharge. He earned a bachelor's degree from Northeastern Illinois University and a master's from Chicago State University. Commander Dempsey then began a 30-year career as a teacher, department chairman, lead teacher, vice-principal, and principal in the Chicago Public Schools.

I admire and appreciate Commander Dempsey for his many contributions as an educator. But that's not all he's done. Throughout his long career and into retirement, he has been a part of the DAV.

He's held positions in the organization ranging from Inspector General, to Legislative Director, to Commissioner of Claims and Service. He has served on at least 7 national committees and has been elected to multiple positions, including his current position as National Commander.

The only way Commander Dempsey was able to continue this level of service while working and maintaining a family life was to include his family in DAV activities. For Commander Dempsey, his wife Patricia, and their two sons, family vacations had to coincide with DAV events.

Families like the Dempseys, who give every last bit of their time and energy in service to their communities, with no expectation of material return, show us the best side of America.

When asked why he is so committed to the work of the DAV, Commander Dempsey says, "its just veterans helping veterans."

As a nation, we face significant challenges in keeping the promises that have been made to our veterans, especially our disabled veterans. Since coming to Congress, I have always been happy

to see DAV representatives because they come with that same singular focus. I have great respect for the DAV and I am proud that the DAV has chosen an Illinoisan as their leader.