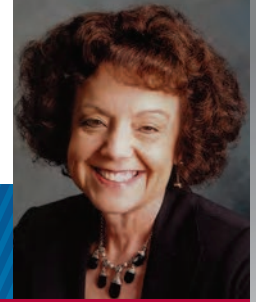


Every Vote Counts



PATRICE RAPISAND

from the AUXILIARY NATIONAL COMMANDER

This year, the people of this nation will make decisions on how to cast their votes for many elected offices, particularly the President of the United States. Remember, voting makes your citizenship count. Your vote makes you a participant in the decisions that shape our country. The United States is a democratic republic, which is a system of government designed to operate by the will of its citizens. This process begins with voter participation. If you don't vote, you don't have a voice.

I recently read a story in the news about a woman who, in 1920, cast a ballot in the first election in which women were allowed to vote nationwide. This year, though confined to a nursing home, she will vote by absentee ballot so as not to miss the election. She said she feels that voting is something we all should do—it's a privilege to vote.

Voting is empowerment. Your vote can make a difference. The challenge lies in being informed, getting involved and making it your personal responsibility to help make our democracy work. Learn about the political process, consider the issues, meet the candidates, write or phone your elected officials with your opinions and ask questions.

The members of the DAV Auxiliary have a responsibility to inform and educate members of Congress about the vital issues affecting disabled veterans and their families. We must continue to call on our government to stand up for veterans. Of course, the Auxiliary always stands by the DAV to make sure we win the fight for disabled veterans.

As I was gathering information for this article, I came across so many bills that benefit the disabled veteran awaiting decisions from

the Congress. Many bills are pending that will improve and enhance the mental health care benefits available to members of the Armed Forces and veterans. Others would authorize major medical facility projects or raise compensation for disabled veterans. There are many issues, far too many to list here, that involve our disabled veterans. You can stay informed through many of the sources DAV offers. Our *DAV Magazine* and website are truly the best way to obtain information concerning bills related to the disabled veteran and family.

A wide variety of people run for offices at the local, state and national levels. Some throw their hats into the ring as early as two years before an election, while others are talked about on the news as possible candidates even before they make any announcement. Talk persists about potential candidates and opposing candidates engaging in mud-slinging campaigns, which makes it difficult for voters to separate truth from hype. Deciding which of the candidates is the best person for the job is not an easy choice. Do your own research on the candidates. Find out about his or her background, experience and public record. Newspapers, magazines and credible Internet sources make it easy to collect a wealth of information on which to base your decisions. A good leader creates a vision for positive change in society that citizens can believe in and support. Communication of that vision is important so that people want to work to achieve it together. As advocates for disabled veterans and their families, consider how the candidate supports legislation to benefit our cause. Together we have the ability to better the lives of America's disabled veterans.