

# October 5 Inaugural Commemoration of National Day to Honor For American Veterans Disabled For Life in Washington DC

Speakers Included Dr. David Shulkin, Secretary of Veterans Affairs; Disabled Iraq War Veteran Sen. Tammy Duckworth; Rep. Lois Frankel, who introduced the Congressional Resolution establishing the day; Paul Rieckhoff, Founder of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America; Don Overton, who was blinded in Operation Desert Storm; and Florida philanthropist Lois Pope, Primary Advocate for the Resolution and Renowned Disabled Veterans Advocate

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 5, 2017 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ --There are more than 4.2 million living disabled veterans in the U.S. Despite the fact that they have sacrificed parts of the bodies – and in some cases their minds – defending the freedoms and ideals enjoyed and cherished by all Americans, they have never been given their own special recognition.

Until now.

Disabled veterans gathered in the nation's capital today (**Thursday, Oct. 5, 2017**) to receive a long-overdue honor: their own national day of tribute.

The **Inaugural Commemoration of the National Day of Honor for American Veterans Disabled for Life**, held at the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial, featured remarks from:

- **David J. Shulkin, MD, U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs;**
- **U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth** of Illinois, an Army Lieutenant Colonel who lost her legs and partial use of her right arm when the Black Hawk helicopter she was piloting in Iraq was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade;
- **U.S. Rep. Lois Frankel** (D-FL), who introduced the Congressional resolution leading to this National Day of Honor. The resolution was contained in the U.S. Rep. Jeff Miller and U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal Veterans Health Improvement Act of 2016. It was signed into law on December 16, 2016 by President Obama;
- **Paul Rieckhoff**, an Army First Lieutenant and Infantry Rifle Platoon Leader in Iraq who is the founder and executive director of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America organization;
- **Don Overton**, who, as a member of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Army Airborne Division, was blinded in Operation Desert Storm (the first Gulf War);

Of particular note, attendees heard from Florida philanthropist and disabled veterans advocate **Lois Pope**, who envisioned the National Day of Honor and who created and spearheaded the building and dedication of the Memorial, the nation's first and only permanent public tribute to the 4.2 million disabled American veterans and all those who died. The Memorial was dedicated on Oct. 5, 2014, making the Oct. 5 date the "most appropriate day for all Americans to show gratitude and support for the men and women who continue to bear the scars of war long after the fighting on the battlefield ends," she said.

"Our wounded warriors have come home from battle missing arms and legs, blind and burned, and permanently traumatized both physically and emotionally. They left the war but the war will never leave them," declared Mrs. Pope, who has championed the cause of disabled veterans for more than a quarter-century. "Now we finally have an opportunity, a day each year to recognize their courage, sacrifice and fortitude."

Secretary Shulkin echoed this sentiment, saying that, "The brave men and women wounded in defense of our nation have earned the eternal gratitude of the American people. The American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial is testament to this, and the National Day of Honor for American Veterans Disabled for Life is an important opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to recognizing and serving this special group of patriots."

"Our nation's Veterans living with a disability have made incredible sacrifices for our country and I'm honored to be a part of this Day of Honor commemorating their service," said Sen. Duckworth. "These brave heroes risked everything to protect our freedom, and I'll keep working to make sure our servicemembers and our Veterans receive the quality care and support they have earned."

The idea for the day came at a Veterans Day ceremony almost 20 years ago, when Mrs. Pope said to then Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the now late Jesse Brown, "We have Veterans Day, complete with all the parades, pomp and pageantry. But, we should also have a day specifically for disabled veterans -- a day for all Americans to show gratitude and support for the men and women who continue to bear the scars of war long after the fighting on the battlefield ends."

Secretary Brown agreed, and while Mrs. Pope was raising funds to build the Memorial, she kept the possibility of the National Day of Honor in her mind. Once the Memorial was officially dedicated, the Day was a natural next step.

"While it is my hope that all Americans experience the Memorial in person, I know that not everyone has the means to come to Washington DC," she said. "A National Day of Honor for American Veterans Disabled for Life would provide the opportunity for all Americans, wherever they are, to celebrate the heroism of disabled veterans and pay back the debt of honor we owe them for their courage and sacrifice."

Because she couldn't just declare such a day, she reached out to those who could, most notably Congresswoman Frankel and Congressman Jeff Miller, who was then chairman of the House Veterans Committee.

Rep. Frankel, whose son is a Marine veteran who served eight years at war in Iraq and Afghanistan, cheered this day finally coming to fruition: "It is with profound appreciation that we recognize our brave men and women who return from war with life altering injuries. Helping these heroes has been a lifetime passion for Lois Pope."

The commemoration also featured a Navy Color Guard, "The President's Own" Marine Corps Brass Band, an Invocation and Benediction by Military Chaplain Carl Barnes, and children's chorus from Hoffman Boston Elementary School in Arlington, VA. CBS Radio correspondent and veteran Eric Dehm served as master of ceremonies.

SOURCE Inaugural Commemoration of the National Day of Honor for American Veterans Disabled for Life