

So Rita, why don't you stand up here while India sings that song? Okay.

(Winds Beneath My Wings sung by India Archer)

(Applause)

PRESIDENT NAVARRETÉ: I believe I have the privilege of making some personal remarks before I give my formal remark.

You know I believe I can fly today and I've got Dorothy's adult shoes to make all those wishes come true.

(Laughter)

PRESIDENT NAVARRETÉ: What a moment that you all have given me. Those 16 years ago when I started, my family has been there to support and love me through my journey. Thank you.

The second family I have is of course the American Legion Family, all the way from the Unit and the District and the Department Level, thank you.

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Department of New Mexico, would you please stand right now.

(Department of New Mexico stands)

(Applause)

PRESIDENT NAVARRETÉ: You may be seated.

You know from that Unit level where we have our members and so important our Juniors, our District, our Sons of the American Legion, The Legion Riders, have been so supportive as we've grown in this organization together.

Things began to happen back in 1993, and I am a firm believer, that things happen for a reason, but you've got to make those changes happen.

JoAnn Cronin, Past National President from the Department of Missouri served in her first --

(Applause)

PRESIDENT NAVARRETÉ: Yes, she deserves that, she has earned the right.

(Applause)

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PRESIDENT NAVARRETÉ: -- served as her first chairmanship when I was on her committee to Girls State.

So our paths have been together since then. To all the past national presidents who saw something in me and believed that I had that potential and then I earned with accomplishments the right to lead and here I am today. I thank you.

And my love for God and Country instilled at a very young age was Old Glory, the red, white and blue.

Good morning everyone. Yes, the strength beneath my wings started at an early age. My mother, my mentor, my role model influenced who I am today. The young girl who sat with her mom at Unit meetings listening and not moving unless told to. How I remember those days even though many, many years ago. At a young age I knew and I believed I could be that person leading the group. I knew my love for God and

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Country was real and I wanted to work and serve for those reasons.

My belief that things happen for a reason have given me time and have been evident throughout my life, not only with my family, but with the American Legion Auxiliary. I have been given the gifts of passion, energy and vision as I continue to serve today. Taking the most important oath of my Auxiliary career it allows me to once again use those gifts in serving in the highest office of the Organization, your National President.

I am your leader who will lead in advocating our purpose and mission of serving veterans, their families and communities and you might say a very proud veteran advocate.

This year the American Legion Auxiliary celebrates 90th Anniversary and you can make your mark to be a part of it. This is a critical time to reconnect with our heritage to strengthen our future

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with our members, veterans and communities in our support for veterans in supporting this 90-Year milestone.

Let me for a moment take you back in the early years of the American Legion Auxiliary's history.

After the end of World War I in 1918 a group of American servicemen bonded together to form the American Legion to represent American Veterans and to remind a grateful nation of its responsibilities to the veteran, his widow and orphan.

The first national convention held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 10 through 12, 1919, the American Legion considered to propose to establish a women's auxiliary, proposal approved. And on November 10, 1919, we were born.

By the second national convention the American Legion there were 1,342 Units in 45 states with 11 thousand members. Minnesota was the first

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Department to qualify for a charter. By the summer of 1921 enough department organizations had been established to justify the calling of a national convention.

It convened in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1921.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT NAVARRETÉ: It was at that convention that the name of the organization was changed from the Women's Auxiliary to the American Legion Auxiliary and adopted the poppy as the memorial flower.

The early years of the American Legion Auxiliary were occupied with developing a program to meet the urgent needs of World War I Veterans, their families, widows and orphans of the dead. Members supported the American Legion in its fight to secure adjusted compensation of World War I Veterans. Carrying and support for hospitalized and disabled

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veterans became a top priority along with their rehabilitation.

The years went by and the mission of the organization remained constant in serving and caring for all veterans.

Members of the organization continued to volunteer their services and support, activities and establish programs. History books break of history of the organization into the 21st century with Volume VII, which was completed in 2008.

Highlights I want to share with you:

1941-42, the first veteran elected National President.

1950-1951, the National President was of Native American descent.

In 1958-59, the National President stated needs on the organization one being membership must continue to grow.

In 1969, the 50th Anniversary time capsule in

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St. Louis, Missouri where historic documents and pictures were placed for the 100th National President.

I am the second national president from the Department of New Mexico. Marcella Davidson celebrated the 50th Anniversary and that was 40 years ago, add them up, I am the 90th National President of this great organization.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT NAVARRETÉ: 1992-1993, focus on homeless veterans.

1994-1995, the 75th Anniversary. Seventy-five years of "Service not Self."

1995-1996, the focus on home and community.

And 1999-2000 was the last elected president of the 20th Century and the first to serve into the 21st Century.

Perhaps said best by the 1980 history author, one of the reasons for the strength of the organization is its adherence to the basic programs,

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Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation and Children in Youth. These two programs together with Americanism and National Security have been the cornerstone of activity. Though other programs have been added from time to time, the American Legion's Auxiliary's efforts have remained true to these programs. It marks a special dedication to the welfare of the veterans and his family or her family to the concern of our nation.

What is happening today?

Today we face a dilemma; our organization is not growing at a healthy pace.

How will we reach new members? I believe we will.

How will we be able to serve the needs of our current military forces? I believe we will meet those needs.

What will be our plan? I believe we have the plan.

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Where will we be in the next ten years? We will exceed all goals and objectives.

I want to be a part of a team that will move forward with new ideas and ways to retain our current members and reach out to individuals in our communities who are eligible and who want to join.

You see, I believe promoting our programs and activities in our communities will bring growth to the organization. Singing to the choir is no longer an effective tool. We each have a responsibility to tell our stories and let people know who we are, what we do and how we can make a difference in our communities.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT NAVARRETÉ: My vision is to have everyone in our own communities know who we are so that when we celebrate that 100th year the name of the American Legion Auxiliary is known throughout.

Can you for a moment image our military

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families coming to us for services? I believe that we can imagine that.

Can you imagine school officials knowing we are the group for citizenship training?

(Applause)

PRESIDENT NAVARRETÉ: Can you imagine our volunteers at medical centers throughout this country leading and serving the needs of women veterans and their families?

AUDIENCE: I believe.

PRESIDENT NAVARRETÉ: I not only can imagine I believe this is possible. The following poem is a favorite one of mine:

It you believe; then you can achieve all your dreams.

If you can see it; then you can do it.

If you believe it; you can achieve it.

It is up to you. You can make your dreams come true.

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It is a critical time for our organization and I am passionate about leading it to a new way of planning for a year of action to meet the objectives. All programs must align with our mission of serving veterans, their families and communities. It's time to reconnect our resources to mission based activities, a unified message for our plans of action emphasize our need to reconnect with our heritage to strengthen our future.

This is the right thing to do and now is the time. It's not about me; it's about every member of this great Organization, every officer of this great Organization, every volunteer of this great Organization.

You see, collective abilities to do the right thing will continue to make history and history starts now.

Plans for the year will cover reconnecting with our members, our veterans and our communities.

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The rich history and traditions of the American Legion Auxiliary will continue to be the foundation that will not only support our mission but will enrich the quality of lives of those that we serve.

Objectives for the year will cover reconnecting with our members again, our veterans and our communities. That member connection, the reconnecting with membership by working together to regain a culture of trust that will allow open communication and engage members to want to retain their membership and recruit new members.

The passion of serving is the driving force that continues to keep our organization strong. We must work hard to keep all members engaged for them to be proud of belonging.

This national president has heard your voices, and will continue to listen to the needs of the membership.

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I ask for your trust and patience to work hand-in-hand in planning and implementing the strategic changes that must move us forward. Our organization has much to give and so many are willing to do whatever it takes to get that job done.

Let's reconnect with our members and get them engaged once again to stand proud of what we do and what we stand for and begin to let our spirit grow as we retain and recruit members.

Allow the Organization leadership to continue their efforts and commitment to achieve what needs to get done.

Our new partnership with the VISTA program under the Corporation for the National and Community Service is just beginning, and believe it will bring success in capacity building for membership growth, but most important, serve our veterans in need.

Under the umbrella of membership will be the theme of "Membership Begins with Me," and retain that

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95 percent of membership as of 12/31/2008, and gain 38 thousand new members, goals which are in our current strategic plans.

The new name this year for revitalization activity is "Membership Support."

National chairmen will be a part of an opportunity to provide department training this coming year at almost no or little costs to departments, details to be announced during the October Presidents and Secretaries Conference.

We want to provide training to demonstrate support in investing in your leadership. That veteran connection, reconnect with the ideals for which they fought and continue to fight to protect the freedom we so enjoy today.

What brought us together in 1990 is ever more relevant to us today. Our services are needed to all veterans and meeting the needs of the new veteran and his and her family is what is now relevant.

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Let's not forget the homeless veteran. Do you realize there are per the Veterans' Affairs statistics, at any given night; 131 thousand homeless veterans and four percent of those are women.

They need our help.

The Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Grant Program will continue as more volunteers are needed in our VA medical facilities. The process has not changed and it's listed in the Plan of Action administered by the National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Chairman nominee, Chris Nelson.

This year we will also focus in supporting the outdoor cycling program at the VA locations around the U.S. to help wounded heroes to overcome obstacles they face. Cycling is an important part of that recovery and rehabilitating program. The Ride to Recovery Program will connect our membership with these veterans and also allow our involvement with our communities by supporting the scheduled cycling

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events.

The American Legion Auxiliary has been an active supporter this last year, and I want to focus on getting members to volunteer their time in promoting the activities surrounding each event, more to come.

Our support of the Veterans' Creative Arts Festival continues and donations are needed to meet our \$100 thousand sponsorship fee.

This year's festival is in San Antonio, Texas, October 11, 2009. The show is free and is open to the public.

Community Connection. Join me in making this 90th anniversary year an exciting and historical milestone of achievement as together we change and grow a stronger organization for it is service, not self that we continue being strong citizens in the greatest country.

Past National President Desi, said it so

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well a year ago: 'We will have a new leadership and new theme to motivate us, but I hope that the legacy I leave will be one of hope. Hope for an even better tomorrow where the best is yet to come."

Well the best once again came as we heard of the unit accomplishments throughout this great nation and community projects were held in promoting the ideals and principals of the American Legion Auxiliary.

Thank you, Desi, for that leadership.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT NAVARRETÉ: Keeping patriotism a part of the education of every child, the love for God and Country. The welfare of the children of veterans who have given their lives for our country and the betterment of our communities in which we live. The recipients of the President's Excellence Awards this year proved the work is being done.

Hope is to believe, and what an opportunity

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we have this 90th year to renew our pledge and recommit our promise to serve others first and not self.

As my mother so often said to me, "Con Dios todo es possible," "With God all is possible."

Thank you.

(Applause)

MS. CRONIN: Madam President Rita, each year our membership anticipates the transition from one administration to another with wonder and excitement. You have laid out for our organization ambitious expectations that will strengthen our ability to support our mission for veterans, their families, children and communities.

As the 90th National President, our Organization, once again, has chosen the right leader for the right time. And we are --

(Applause)

MS. CRONIN: Go ahead.

(Applause)

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MS. CRONIN: -- we are up to the challenges
you have placed before us.

Thank you for placing the American Legion
Auxiliary as a priority in your life as you lead the
Organization this year. And thank you to your family
for their support.

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