



# The Road to Recovery Report

An Update for Supporters of the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes

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## Wounded troops, families getting desperate as Memorial Day emergency relief drive falls short



*This Memorial Day, the Coalition will be helping more wounded troops like retired Army Sfc. Jaime Irizarry. Jaime was blinded in his left eye and suffered a devastating head trauma in Iraq. Gifts from Coalition supporters helped him avert foreclosure on his home. He said their generosity "has meant so much to me."*

The Coalition's Memorial Day Emergency Aid Drive was created to throw a financial lifeline to desperate wounded troops like retired Air Force Staff Sgt. Michael Hrobar. In his letter to the Coalition, he wrote,

"I was suicidal and put myself in the hospital. We have four kids. . . . I got notice that I was being evicted in 72 hours."

The rest of Michael's letter appears inside this newsletter. And our faithful supporters will be glad to know it has a happy ending.

Unfortunately, many other equally desperate wounded heroes may not get help in time, because the Memorial Day Emergency Aid Drive is falling short, according to Coalition Chairman David Walker.

Walker believes some of the Coalition's usual supporters may be in a "cash crunch" themselves because of the uncertain economy and rising food and gas prices.

In any case, he said, he hopes donations pick up quickly because our seriously injured servicemen and women are hurting far more than the country as a whole.

"Michael's story shows how members of the Coalition's family, by working together, can rescue our severely wounded troops and even save lives," Walker says. "That's why it's so important that we get

this year's Memorial Day effort back on track, before it's too late."

The Coalition kicked off the emergency relief effort in March with a letter from retired Army Sgt. Jorge DeLeon, himself a wounded soldier.

Jorge lost his leg during a combat mission in Afghanistan. After spending seven months in the hospital, he returned home to Texas, where his wife was forced to leave her job to take care of him and their three children.

Jorge's family received emergency financial aid from Coalition supporters. Inspired by that outpouring of generosity, the wounded soldier joined the Coalition's staff so he could help others. Today the wounded hero works in a Coalition office in San Antonio, Texas, and frequently visits servicemen and women receiving treatment at the nearby Brooke Army Medical Center. Jorge also serves as a national spokesman for the Coalition.

"As my letter and others point out, because of the sluggish government bureaucracy, my fellow wounded troops are waiting more than a year, on average, to receive their first government disability check after being released from the hospital and separated from service," Jorge said.

"That is why the Coalition's mission is so important. It's also why each and every member of the Coalition family is a godsend." ■

### KEY PROGRAMS:

*Emergency Financial Aid*

*Partner Appreciation Program*

*Road to Recovery Conference & Tribute*

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Providing Emergency Aid to Troops Severely Wounded in Afghanistan or Iraq



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## By the numbers: Your generosity at work



*Here's a brief sampling of severely wounded troops who have been helped by generous donations to the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes.*

- Marine Cpl. Casey S. from Terrell, Texas contacted the Coalition with overdue rent, vehicle and utility payments. He needed \$2,769.08 to get caught up and buy some groceries.  
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$2,769.08**
- Army Sgt. Gary T. from Williamstown, Kentucky suffered a spinal injury and has painful arthritis. He needed \$1,433.51 to help buy food and fix his car.  
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$1,433.51**
- Army Spc. Adam C. from Colorado Springs, Colorado, who suffers from the aftereffects of a traumatic brain injury, needed \$687.29 to fix his vehicle.  
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$687.29**
- Army Sgt. Sean V. from Terre Haute, Indiana needed \$500.00 to repair his vehicle.  
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$500.00**
- Army Spc. Joshua H. from Norwood, Ohio was behind on his rent and could not even afford food. He needed \$1,150.00 for rent and groceries.  
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$1,150.00**
- Army Spc. Patrick M. from Woodbury, Connecticut found himself \$2,522.47 behind on utility, insurance and car payments.  
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$2,522.47**
- Marine Lance Cpl. Charles B. from Grants Pass, Oregon faced a \$1,862.00 vehicle repair bill he could not pay.  
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$1,862.00**
- Army Spc. Christopher J. from Evans Mills, New York suffered a traumatic brain injury, and was facing financial catastrophe with \$3,374.17 in past due rent and utility payments.  
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$3,374.17**
- Army Spc. Robert L. from Jacksonville, Florida, lost his left hand serving our country. He needed \$1,500.00 to complete a vehicle purchase.  
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$1,500.00**
- Army Sgt. Matthew P. from Cincinnati, Ohio needed emergency help with an overdue car payment of \$1,012.88.  
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$1,012.88**
- Army Staff Sgt. Norwood W. from Hephzibah, Georgia contacted the Coalition when he was faced with eviction unless he paid \$1,100.00 in back rent.  
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$1,100.00**
- Marine Cpl. Benjamin W. from Northville, Michigan had \$2,400.00 in overdue rent payments to make or he would have been evicted.  
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$2,400.00**
- Army Sgt. Al S. from Port Orange, Florida suffered disabling injuries and needed \$1,967.64 to cover overdue utility bills and to buy groceries.  
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$1,967.64**
- Marine Sgt. Blas V. from Long Beach, California, suffered a traumatic brain injury while serving in Iraq and caused him to fall behind on rent payments. He needed \$1,755.00 to get current.  
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$1,755.00**
- Army Sgt. Donald G. from Corvallis, Montana is dealing with a painful back injury from combat. He needed \$976.31 to pay medical bills and buy groceries.  
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$976.31**
- Army Sgt. Ezekiel C. from Olathe, Kansas is paralyzed on his left side and suffers from a traumatic brain injury. A host of overdue utility bills totaling \$1,314.77 hung over his head when he called the Coalition.  
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$1,314.77**
- Army Sgt. Jaime A. from Dale City, California needed to find a new place to live and \$2,383.33 for a deposit and first month's rent.  
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$2,383.33**
- Army Sgt. First Class Kirk O. from Vine Grove, Kentucky contacted the Coalition needing \$4,021.95 to catch up with overdue mortgage and vehicle payments.  
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$4,021.95**



## Thank you letters from our severely wounded troops

### “If it wasn’t for the Coalition, my four children and I would be out in the streets.”

I am not the same as I once was. On a rescue mission, my vehicle was hit by an IED (improvised explosive device). I was blown out of my Humvee and was fighting my way to try to save my soldiers. I was shot five times and a rocket-propelled grenade hit me, taking off my left leg. My wife lost her job when she came to be with me when I was hurt. It has been very difficult on all of us. To the people that helped – thank you!

— **Retired Army Staff Sgt. William Castillo,**  
**Orlando, Florida**

I was hit with a fragment that severed two nerves in my right arm and shattered my ulna just below the elbow. I also had a large laceration on my left bicep. My wife has had to take on additional responsibilities that she didn’t have before, caring for my injuries as well as for our five children. We have had to buy different adaptive equipment. We have to buy different day-to-day items that allow me to use them on my own.

— **Marine Gunnery Sgt. Joseph G.,**  
**San Diego, California**

We are waiting for my husband to get his prosthesis. He is still recovering and will be for the next year. It has been pretty stressful at times but we remain optimistic and hope he is home with us soon walking. We have lost around \$800 a month in special pay since my husband can no longer do his job. [The Coalition] has been great for our family.

— **Penney V., wife of Marine Sgt. Chuy V.,**  
**Wilmington, North Carolina**

The Coalition came through when we needed them most, with the cost of utilities rising.

— **Retired Army Sgt. Brian Saaristo,**  
**Barnum, Minnesota**

While stationed in Balad, Iraq, our base took mortar fire. A mortar landed 10-15 feet from me. Shrapnel hit both legs and my left arm. Injuries included a severed femoral artery and a shattered left femur. My post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and daily pain make it difficult to hold down a job. It has made things difficult to keep up with bills and a mortgage. I am in between jobs and a bit disheartened with my life, but the Coalition has helped change that.

— **Retired Army Sgt. Travis J. Harvey,**  
**Cocoa, Florida**



I was suicidal and put myself in the hospital. We have four kids, so that put everything on my wife. The bills just don’t get paid. Been waiting almost nine months for my medical benefits, but it hasn’t happened yet. I was getting evicted and the Coalition paid my

rent. I got notice that I was being evicted in 72 hours. If it wasn’t for the Coalition, my four children and I would be out in the streets. I appreciate and applaud everyone who donated to this cause.

— **Retired Air Force Staff Sgt. Michael Hrobar,**  
**Sanford, Florida**

### Policy on using troops’ names and photos

Readers of “The Road to Recovery Report” may wonder why some service members are identified by their full names and in other cases only first names and last initials are used. The reason is that the U.S. Department of Defense has asked the Coalition to refrain from using the full names of active military personnel, and we are complying with that request by using only their last name initial, when applicable. In the case of retired service members, in order to protect their privacy, the Coalition uses their full names and/or photos only with their permission.



## Meet some of the men who “never would have survived” without the help of Coalition donors



**Sgt. Frank Garren**  
U.S. Army (Ret.)  
Chatham, Illinois

**Injury:** Lost partial use of his left leg and foot from nerve damage caused by shrapnel from an IED (improvised explosive device).

**Financial hardship:** Sharp decline in income after retirement. Faced foreclosure on his home and repossession of vehicles.

*“I would do it all over again for my country, but without the Coalition I never would have survived stateside.”*



**Sgt. Jeremiah Conner**  
USMC (Ret.)  
Palm Harbor, Florida

**Injury:** Traumatic brain injury from multiple bomb blasts, post traumatic stress disorder.

**Financial hardship:** Living with in-laws on air mattress.

*“Coalition has helped me on my way to getting better.”*



**Sgt. Steven Miner**  
U.S. Army (Ret.)  
Yulee, Florida

**Injury:** Traumatic brain injuries and a ruptured retina from multiple IED and mortar blasts.

**Financial hardship:** Unable to retrain for new career after suffering battlefield injuries.

*“Very grateful to people who support veterans. Very rewarding to know that people care about us.”*



**Sgt. Gary Wynn**  
U.S. Army (Ret.)  
Seminole, Florida

**Injury:** Suffered severe back injury during firefight in Iraq.

**Financial hardship:** Lost the family business. Wife can only work part-time because of huge childcare costs. Had two cars repossessed and were forced to live on food stamps.

*“We will have a Christmas with our \$500 gift check. I can’t wait to see my kids’ smiling faces. Wish I could give them more; it’s hard to make them understand.”*



**Chief Warrant Officer Levi Rogers**  
U.S. Army  
San Antonio, Texas

**Injury:** Severe burns and internal injuries after an IED blast that killed four teammates in southwest Afghanistan.

**Financial hardship:** Forced to move from North Carolina to Texas almost immediately.

*“A veteran retiring in 2002 received a lot less support than one retiring in 2010, thanks to the work of the Coalition.”*



**Sgt. James Wilson**  
U.S. Army (Ret.)  
Crystal Lakes, Missouri

**Injury:** Burned when the truck he was riding in exploded. Temporarily paralyzed, third-degree burns from the waist down. Can’t be in the sun, blast caused traumatic brain injury, leaving serious memory loss.

**Financial hardship:** Divorced. Has custody of only daughter. Needs to make basic repairs on his home and buy propane for heat.

*“I didn’t want to ask for help because of my pride. I really appreciate the people who provide help to the Coalition.”*

### Please consider a monthly gift to the Partners for Heroes program

Want to help our wounded heroes even more? Then consider making an automatic monthly gift. You’ll get less mail from the Coalition, because we’ll know your monthly gift is coming. And the money saved on printing and postage will make your gift go farther, to help more severely wounded troops and their families. For more information, call us at (888) 447-2588, or visit our web site at [saluteheroes.org](http://saluteheroes.org) and click the “Donate Now” button.

