

# The Road to Recovery Report

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

Volume 47 ★ June 2014

## Providing Emergency Aid to Troops Severely Disabled in the War on Terror

“The Coalition to Salute America's Heroes has an immediate impact. If you need it now, they are there now.”

— Retired Army Sgt. Justin Bond (on crutches), shown here taking part in a veterans parade along with his wife, Lauren.



Summer is a challenging time for our troops severely disabled in the war on terror. Some suffer from burns which make the hot summer months excruciatingly uncomfortable. Others can't afford to run the air conditioning because they don't have money for utilities. And for still others, summer is just a continuation of the painful struggle to recover and build a new "normal" after debilitating injuries turned their lives upside down.

So it's appropriate the patriotic holidays we celebrate in the summertime – Memorial Day and Independence Day – honor the sacrifices of our troops and veterans.

At the Coalition, those sacrifices are at the front of our thoughts every day. Because every day we hear from severely disabled servicemen and women who sacrificed so much for our country ... but now find themselves battling homelessness, hunger, and other financial disasters.

And it is Coalition supporters like you who make it possible for us to help these heroes.

As you're about to read in these pages, your support makes a difference every day.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your life-changing generosity towards our severely disabled veterans.

## Inside your Road to Recovery Report:

Letter from President  
David Walker  
page 2

News & Updates: Your Coalition  
in Action  
page 3

Donors Help Blinded Veteran  
Provide for His Family  
page 4

How to Make Your Gift Go Farther  
page 6

Double Amputee Veteran  
Completes Cross-Country Ride  
page 7

Thank You Letters from  
Grateful Veterans  
page 8



# Letter from President David Walker

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Dear Friend of Our Wounded Heroes,

It's my pleasure to share with you this latest issue of *The Road to Recovery Report* – the Coalition's newsletter highlighting how we're putting your donations to work to combat the frightening financial crises facing our severely disabled military service members every day.

As a nation we owe a debt of gratitude to the brave servicemen and women who unhesitatingly answered the call and put their lives on the line to protect us and our families.

And I know you take that responsibility seriously. As a faithful supporter of our wounded warriors, you've already done so much to share in the privilege of lending a helping hand to these veterans in their time of need.

Your thoughts and prayers tell our severely disabled heroes you appreciate their sacrifices. Your signed thank you cards bring them cheer and comfort during their darkest days. And your generous financial support gives them peace of mind by helping to keep a roof over their heads, food on their tables, and lights on in their homes.

And just as you've sacrificed to make it possible for the Coalition to lighten the load for our suffering wounded troops, I also want you to share in our joys and our victories. That's why *The Road to Recovery Report* you're holding in your hands is full of stories and photos of severely disabled veterans whose lives have been changed by your generosity.

Because for me and the Coalition staff, it makes all of our hard work worth it to hear just one brave disabled hero say, "I was at the end of my rope. Thank you for keeping a roof over my head when I had nowhere else to turn."

I'm so grateful for the friendship of men and women like you who selflessly give to help these wounded warriors who are struggling to provide for themselves and their families. I know I speak for them and everyone at the Coalition when I say "thank you" for your ongoing and generous support.

Gratefully yours,

David Walker  
President & CEO





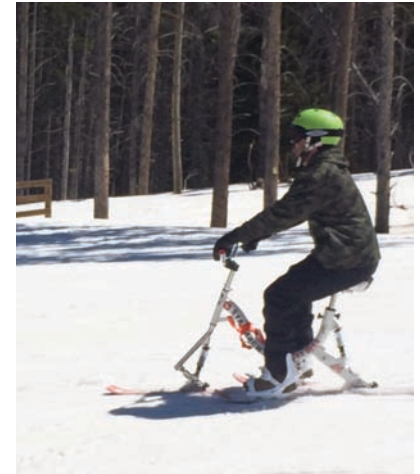
## Your support sponsors two families for 7th annual Wounded Warriors Family Ski Week

In February the Coalition awarded a \$5,000 grant sending two disabled veterans and their families to the 2014 Wounded Warriors Family Ski Week in Breckenridge, Colorado. Organized by Wounded Warriors Family Adventures (WWFA), the ski program is designed to broaden disabled veterans' perceptions of what they can achieve and reconnect families struggling with the stress of post-war disabilities.

"Sometimes, the best thing we can do for a wounded hero is provide an opportunity for family bonding and healing in a fun and safe environment," said Coalition President David Walker. "The WWFA offers an exceptional setting for these brave men and women and we're pleased to provide an opportunity for two families to benefit from the experience."

The Family Ski Week is the WWFA's signature event, featuring one-on-one adaptive ski and snowboard lessons, group outings, and counseling for 10-12 warriors and their families. The participants and their families receive transportation, lodging, activities, food and counseling sessions, all at no cost.

Robert Miller, President of Wounded Warriors Family Adventures, expressed gratitude for the Coalition's support. "The Coalition is a very generous veterans' charity, and we're proud they selected our Family Ski Week program to help fund. We hope this is the first of many opportunities we'll have to work together to serve our nation's best men and women."



A disabled veteran travels down the slopes on a mono ski.



Original Mud Run participants brave a military-style obstacle course while benefitting the Coalition.

### Original Mud Run benefits Coalition

This spring, participants in select Original Mud Run events had the option to donate \$10 of their registration fee to benefit the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes.

Money raised from the events, which featured a choice of 5K and 10K military-style obstacle courses, benefitted Coalition's Heroes Thanking Heroes program. (Read more about the Coalition's innovative Heroes Thanking Heroes program on page 4 of your newsletter.)

"The Original Mud Run looked

awesome," said retired Marine and Coalition Regional Vice President Donny Daughenbaugh. "I contacted the organizers to see if they would be willing to make the Coalition a beneficiary of their race series. When they learned about our 'Heroes Thanking Heroes' program, they immediately grasped its significance and pledged their support."

"The Coalition to Salute America's Heroes is doing extraordinary work," said Vanessa Vavra, Original Mud Run Marketing Director.

### Coalition named a 2014 Helios Apollo Award finalist

The Coalition has been named a finalist for the prestigious 2014 Helios Apollo Awards – one of five finalists in the Hercules category for nonprofits. The award honors leaders in employee development and community impact in the Washington, D.C. area.

"The Coalition's nomination is a true testament to our evolution as a place where employees, many of whom are combat-wounded veterans or family members of wounded

veterans, can grow and feel that they are part of something great," said Coalition President and CEO David Walker.

The 2014 Helios Apollo Awards winners will be announced in front of over 500 senior-level attendees at a ceremony at the Ritz Carlton in Tysons Corner, Virginia.





**Hugo Gonzalez and his wife Any at the 2013 Road to Recovery Conference.**



**Hugo hard at work making calls for Heroes Thanking Heroes.**

## Veteran blinded in Iraq calls Coalition donors “American patriots”

**R**etired Specialist Hugo Gonzalez’s life was forever changed one June night in Iraq in 2004. He was out on combat patrol, searching for a factory making IEDs, when he was ambushed.

An IED explosion left Hugo with a penetrating traumatic brain injury (TBI). The wave expansion of the blast crushed his skull inward, sending pieces of bone into his brain. As a result, he suffers from post traumatic epilepsy syndrome and migraines.

Hugo also lost his right eye, and a piece of hot shrapnel tore a hole in his left eye retina, causing him to lose central vision in that eye.

Hugo struggles daily with the symptoms of PTSD. “You never know when it’s going to strike,” Hugo says. “But it’s present, like the ticking of a clock.” Little things trigger his PTSD, from the beeping of a microwave to the smell of raw meat. “It takes a lot of patience in order to overcome what it is living with PTSD,” he says. “One of the worst things that I experienced is not being able to cope with what other people see as the simple things in life.”

Hugo’s blindness, epilepsy, migraines,

and PTSD made it challenging for him to provide for his family. He first contacted the Coalition when he had fallen behind on his mortgage. “I started to get worried because they started sending foreclosure letters. So I called the Coalition out of desperation to see how they could help us,” he says. “And to my surprise, they made the mortgage payments and got me caught up.”

And that’s not the only way your generosity has helped the Gonzalez family. For over six years Hugo has worked for the Heroes Thanking Heroes program, making phone calls from his home to thank donors – who he describes as “American patriots” – for their contributions to the Coalition. Hugo has thrived in the position, which accommodates his disability, and was recently promoted to Assistant Team Lead.

“I get a lot of satisfaction thanking these donors for the blessings they send to our household,” Hugo says. “The Coalition is also giving me the opportunity to feel productive – to feel that I am able to put food on my table and at the same time not need a military uniform to work for my country. I will always be grateful to the Coalition for that opportunity.”

## Coalition donors change lives through Heroes Thanking Heroes program

**T**he Emergency Financial Aid programs our generous donors fund are lifelines to severely disabled veterans on the brink of financial disaster.

And, with your help, the Coalition goes one step further – equipping our heroes to survive and provide for their families in the long term.

As a Coalition supporter, you’ve heard countless stories of severely disabled troops we’ve rescued from homelessness, hunger, and financial ruin.

Many severely disabled troops are waiting ten months (or longer) to receive their first disability check after separating from service, and often their spouses have to quit their jobs to care for them. Suddenly, the family is without income, and the

bills start piling up. When you’re supporting a family – often one with young children – it doesn’t take long to find yourself on the edge of financial ruin.

Heroes Thanking Heroes (HTH) provides part time, flexible employment to wounded veterans or their primary caregivers by enabling them to make phone calls from their homes, personally thanking donors for their contributions to the Coalition. Caregivers can even make their calls from hospitals, so they can stay by their loved one’s side during treatment or surgery.

Since the program’s inception in April 2006, more than 100 wounded veterans or their primary caregivers have participated in Heroes Thanking Heroes.





## By the numbers: Your generosity at work

**O**ur generous donors – like you – care deeply about our servicemen and women severely disabled in the war on terror. The Coalition shares that burden – and together we’ve been able to do great things. Every single day we’re changing the lives of heroes who might otherwise go hungry, be turned out into the street, or suffer another financial disaster.

Here are just a handful of examples of severely disabled troops and veterans who have called the Coalition on the brink of financial disaster – who we’ve been able to help, thanks to your generous giving and commitment to the Coalition and our veterans of the war on terror.



Marissa S. from Byron, Michigan was medically retired after being injured while serving in Iraq. She needed \$2,475 to pay her rent and avoid eviction.

★ Emergency aid from Coalition donors: \$2,475

Robert S. of Fresno, California was paralyzed after serving in Afghanistan. He needed \$1,000 for the basic necessities of food and gas.

★ Emergency aid from Coalition donors: \$1,000

James K. from Puyallup, Washington suffered a traumatic brain injury while serving in Afghanistan. He needed \$1,388 to make his car and insurance payments and buy food.

★ Emergency aid from Coalition donors: \$1,388

Perfecto M. of Reno, Nevada served his country in Iraq – and returned home with PTSD. He needed \$500 for food.

★ Emergency aid from Coalition donors: \$500

David F. from Virginia Beach, Virginia suffers from PTSD after serving in Iraq. He desperately needed \$2,216.85 to pay his rent and cell phone bill.

★ Emergency aid from Coalition donors: \$2,216.85

Michael L. of Weiser, Idaho suffers from PTSD due to his wartime service in Iraq. He needed \$2,111 to pay his mortgage.

★ Emergency aid from Coalition donors: \$2,111

Jonathan B. from San Francisco, California served in Afghanistan and now suffers from PTSD. He had fallen behind on his bills and needed \$1,760.58 to pay his utilities and insurance bills.

★ Emergency aid from Coalition donors: \$1,760.58

Andrew M. of Redding, California served in Iraq – and returned home with PTSD. He needed \$2,135.95 for car repairs.

★ Emergency aid from Coalition donors: \$2,135.95

Amanda E. from North, Michigan returned from serving in Afghanistan with PTSD. She needed \$2,176.22 for oil to heat her home.

★ Emergency aid from Coalition donors: \$2,176.22

George H. of Salem, Oregon served his country in Iraq – and now suffers with PTSD. He needed \$431.70 for car repairs and \$500 for food.

★ Emergency aid from Coalition donors: \$931.70

Aaron W. of Kearney, Missouri returned home from his service in Iraq with PTSD. He called the Coalition to tell us he needed \$2,500 for home repairs.

★ Emergency aid from Coalition donors: \$2,500

**Service in Iraq and Afghanistan left retired Army Staff Sgt. Christopher Mickle suffering from PTSD and painful physical afflictions, including back and leg injuries which keep him on crutches. The Coalition “gave me financial help when I needed it,” says the disabled veteran.**



### Coalition 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 initials are used. The U.S. Department of Defense has asked the Coalition to refrain from using the full names of active duty military personnel. We comply with that request by using initials instead of full names. To protect the privacy of retired service members, the Coalition uses full names and photos only with their permission.



## Monthly giving makes your gift go farther and helps more severely disabled troops

**A**s a loyal supporter of the Coalition, you already know severely wounded troops and veterans across our country are facing homelessness, hunger, and other financial hardships.

I'm sure you agree this isn't the way we should "thank" our wounded troops for their service – especially those who were willing to sacrifice life and limb for our freedoms.

With that in mind, I hope you'll consider joining *Partners for Heroes*, the Coalition's monthly giving program, which allows you to automatically and securely donate to the Coalition by checking account or credit card.

Your monthly gift will ensure the Coalition has the much needed funds to provide emergency aid to wounded heroes and their families – right away, when they need it most. Because every moment counts when you're facing homelessness or your child is going hungry.

Having a predictable monthly income stream enables the Coalition to plan more efficiently. And that allows us to rescue more disabled troops facing evictions, utility cutoffs, and other financial disasters.

And participating in *Partners for Heroes* has great benefits for *you*, as well:

- ★ Your monthly donation will be conveniently debited from your checking account or charged to your credit card each month. There is no need to waste time writing checks or searching for stamps and you can cancel at any time.
- ★ The number of Coalition mailings you receive will be reduced, so the money saved on postage and printing will make your gift go farther each month.
- ★ Your monthly gifts will be tracked; at year's end, you'll receive a statement of donations for tax purposes.

Your monthly gift is important no matter the amount. When you have lost your legs and can't work, or your wife has quit her job to care for you as you battle PTSD, every dollar makes a huge difference just to help put food on the table.

Please consider becoming a *Partners for Heroes* contributor today so your monthly gift can start making a difference right away for more severely wounded service members and their families. For more information on how to enroll, please see your enclosed reply form.

**T**he Coalition strongly believes that you, our generous supporters, are the lifeblood of this organization. We value your feedback on our programs and are eager to learn more about you and your thoughts on the work we are doing. With this in mind, we try to regularly reach out to our supporters via email and our direct mail program and offer you the opportunity to interact with us. Below is a sampling of recent survey results.

### Results of Coalition Board of Directors survey of supporters

- ★92% of Coalition supporters who responded have themselves served or have had a family member serve in the Armed Forces.
- ★88% of respondents think our media outlets don't give a lot of coverage to the financial crises faced by our troops severely wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- ★64% of respondents believe our wounded troops and veterans are waiting ten months or more to receive their first disability check after separating from service because government is inefficient, ineffective, or doesn't make our troops a high priority.
- ★72% of respondents think citizens like Coalition supporters give financial help more quickly to our wounded troops and veterans than the government does!

### Results of Coalition supporters survey on wounded troops suffering from PTSD & TBI

- ★44% of respondents think service members with "invisible injuries" like PTSD and TBI receive lower disability ratings because the government bureaucrats making decisions are more concerned about saving money than about our troops' well-being ...
- ★... and 36% think it's because the government lacks vital knowledge about PTSD and TBI.
- ★28% think the government is doing its best but is overwhelmed by the number of PTSD and TBI disability claims.
- ★32% think the agencies responsible for disability claims are inefficient.
- ★And 32% think the government could do a better job, but just doesn't think our troops are a high priority.



## “When Americans work together towards a goal, we can pretty much do anything.”

### Double amputee Rob Jones spreads Coalition’s mission by cycling from Maine to California

Listen to Rob Jones speak, and you’ll be instantly struck by his positivity. He has remained upbeat – even after an Afghani IED explosion ripped away both the former Marine’s legs. “I didn’t spend a whole lot of time being distraught about my situation,” Rob says matter-of-factly. “I decided to go ahead and skip all that being depressed stuff and just get on with it.”

And get on with it he did. Rob used athletics as a tool for recovery, refusing to allow his disability to hold him down. Rob connected with the Coalition when he got the chance to travel to California to train with an Olympic medalist rowing coach, but lacked the necessary funds. “The flight out and back, the hotel and rental car all came to about \$5,000, which I didn’t have,” Rob said. “Coalition took care of it.” Rob and his rowing partner went on to win the bronze at the 2012 Paralympic Games.

Help like the Coalition’s inspired Rob to make his cross-country journey, giving back to “the charities that gave him the tools to go on living. I believe in leading from the front,” he says. “Now people can see what I’m doing and use it to make a difference in their own lives and maybe in someone else’s life.”

After battling rain, snow, ice, and wind, Rob arrived in Camp Pendleton, California on April 12, six months (181 days) after leaving Bar Harbor, Maine. He was greeted by a cheering crowd of Americans, inspired by Rob’s message of determination, hope, and leadership.

Appearing on The Today Show near the end of his journey Rob said, “There have been a lot of times where I’ve been tired of it and I want to stop. But I never want to quit.”

And now that he has completed his cross-country ride, Rob Jones still isn’t quitting. As a Coalition spokesperson, he continues sharing the Coalition’s message of hope with severely disabled servicemen and women across the country. He hasn’t decided what his next move will be, but he says he may try his hand at stand-up comedy ... or compete in a triathlon in the 2016 Paralympics.

For more information on Rob’s cross-country journey, visit [www.robjonesjourney.com](http://www.robjonesjourney.com).



Rob at his home in Virginia.



Rob works to regain his strength following the above-the-knee amputation of both his legs.



Rob Jones with members of “Team Rob” (including Coalition President David Walker) at the finish line at Camp Pendleton, California.



CSAH Ambassador Corps member Col. Evan Miller and President David Walker congratulate Rob on his accomplishment.

### Rob Jones' Journey

- ★ Started: October 14, 2013
- ★ Finished: April 12, 2014
- ★ Start: Bar Harbor, Maine
- ★ Finish: Camp Pendleton, California
- ★ Miles traveled: 5,242
- ★ Donations raised: \$123,646



## Disabled heroes say **“Thank you”** for your special Easter gift



*This Spring you most likely received a letter from us requesting donations for our **2014 Emergency Easter Meals Project**, a project to provide troops and veterans severely disabled in the war on terror with \$60 each for a special Easter meal with all the trimmings. Thanks to your generosity, we were able to reach 1,000 heroes who might otherwise have gone hungry or been unable to feed their children or gather with family this Easter. Here are just a handful of the heartfelt thank you letters and emails we received from wounded heroes whose holiday you brightened.*

“I just wanted to say thank you for the Easter card and check. I feel so blessed that you thought of me and my family. Your generous gift will allow us to have a wonderful Easter meal.”  
— Jason & Heather S.

“I’m not a person of many words, but I must tell this organization and its donors, thank you from the bottom of my heart. My life after the military has been the darkest time in my life and I’m still struggling with my condition and trying to survive. I try to take life one day at a time, and want to again say thank you, you guys can’t even imagine how much you have helped and how much this means to vets like me.”  
— Avilus H.

“I got my mail today, and opened the letter from the Coalition. It could not have come at [a] more important time. The night before I got less than an hour of sleep, and for the past week I had been feeling fairly hopeless. With PTSD these times of despair come and go, but this one was severely dragging me down. The first thing I saw was the card, and when I opened it my eyes went right past the message down to the bottom where it was signed, by Simon. Just one little word written on a preprinted card: “Simon,” has given me what I need to get through the rest of the day. Thanks too for the donation. It will help me make my family’s traditional Easter meal. Thank you.”  
— Donna B.

“I just want to thank you so much for the \$60 gift for Easter. It came at a time that my family and I could really use it. Thank you again from the bottom of my heart. You all really brightened my day.”  
— Karl L.

*Providing Emergency Aid to Troops Severely Disabled in the War on Terror*