



June 2014

An Open Letter from the Desk of David Walker

At the halfway point of 2014, I am pleased to report that the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes is on a roll like never before, providing badly-needed assistance and support to wounded veterans, helping them meet their bills during the long interim between their return from the battlefield and the resolution of their benefit claims. We are also engaged in an expanding variety of support programs to help them adjust to civilian life, cope with their injuries and resume productive places in our nation's economy – and also to let them know how much their fellow citizens recognize and appreciate their service to our country.

We continue to advance our standing as a premiere organization serving our nation's veterans. In point of fact, we recently received approval to participate in the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) which I believe is a first in some years for the Coalition and underscores the exemplary reputation we have earned in our service to wounded veterans.

This recognition is reflected in the positive media coverage we are receiving on a regular basis. We were in particular pleased with a lengthy article in *Parade* magazine, the Sunday insert that reaches tens of millions of people, which recognized our efforts on behalf of female veterans. Women veterans make up the fastest-growing segment of the homeless, and predictably many of these homeless female veterans suffer from physical wounds and post-traumatic stress disorder. Our own Jil Hinds, director of veteran services for the Coalition, was quoted in the story. She emphasized the unique burdens carried by female veterans. "From the time they get off the bus or plane, instantly they have to go into mommy mode," Jil said. "Men might be allowed the time to adjust during their first few months at home. With a female, she's got to hit the ground running. There's no time to sit and grieve."

In a related matter, we generated positive media coverage of the opening of a new homeless shelter for wounded female veterans and their families in Washington, D.C. The Coalition was a major sponsor of this project, and joined several local dignitaries and members of Congress at the dedication ceremony.

The media coverage just kept on coming. I penned a special op-ed about the lingering impact of post-traumatic stress disorder that appeared in the May 20, 2014, *Washington Times*. My op-ed, entitled *The Lingering Cost of War*. Donny Daughenbaugh, a Coalition Vice President, was featured extensively on a Detroit news broadcast during his "Happy Hour With A Hero" event at a local Bennigan's restaurant, with which we have been co-sponsoring special events for wounded veterans. And another Coalition hero, Rob Jones, garnered extensive local and national news coverage during his coast-to-coast bicycle ride from Maine to San Diego on his prosthetic legs to demonstrate the ability of wounded veterans to transcend their injuries, and also to raise money for wounded veterans groups such as the Coalition.

We also won plaudits from members of Congress, several of whom placed tribute to the Coalition in the *Congressional Record*:

- Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick of Arizona paid tribute to the Coalition's Sgt. Mary Herrera and the Coalition "for their efforts to improve the lives of those who have fought and served our country with distinction."
- Rep. Frank Wolf of Virginia said he is "especially proud of the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes and the work it is doing to fill a terrible void in our society."
- Rep. Lamar Smith of Texas noted that our own Sgt. Jorge De Leon's service "did not end as a result of his battlefield injuries;"
- Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, also a veteran, said that in addition to our work to address homelessness among wounded veterans our "emergency aid services also aim to combat the troubling rates of suicide and domestic abuse among service members and veterans."
- Rep. Randy K. Weber of Texas said the Coalition in just one year has "transformed an organization with a righteous mission into a leading national organization that gives hope to veterans."

Finally, permit me to mention a special musical tribute by a delightful woman named Cassidy Diana who was first exposed to the sacrifices of our military personnel through the multiple tours of duty served by her father. Those experiences led this young aspiring songwriter from West Palm Beach to compose her first song, "The Call," in tribute to her dad. Last December, Cassidy sang "God Bless America" at the Coalition's Road to Recovery Conference and Tribute in Orlando where more than 100 wounded veterans and their families had gathered. She was so moved by the people there that she composed another song, "Salute," which she debuted at a free Memorial Day concert at the Delray Center for the Arts where she was joined on stage at the Crest Theater by an all-star band of renowned musicians. Cassidy has pledged all proceeds from her song, that is available on iTunes, to the Coalition.

That last comment is one we cherish and take to heart. We are fully dedicated to this mission we have chosen. No one here is feathering his or her own nest, we are working diligently on behalf of the wounded veterans who need and deserve our support. We depend on other people who care about our nation's heroes who enable us to provide these services. With God's grace, we will continue to improve our efforts to perform this vital work.

Sincerely,

David W. Walker
President & CEO
Coalition to Salute America's Heroes
www.saluteheroes.org