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Open Letter to Donors

History records that after the famous battle of the Armada in 1588, in which the British staved off an invasion by Spain, Queen Elizabeth ordered her ships to remain at sea for months. There was no military reason – only an economic one. Had the ships come ashore, all those military personnel would expect to be paid. Given the deplorable living conditions on the ships, every passing day at sea meant hundreds more would die, reducing the demands on the Queen's treasury. (There was no financial reward in those days for soldiers and sailors who died on duty.) When they finally made it to land, the total force was greatly diminished and her highness saved a lot of cash.

We live in a more enlightened age and our wounded veterans returning from the wars – mainly Afghanistan and Iraq – can count on financial assistance from the government. To be sure, it takes Uncle Sam a while to process all the paperwork during which time our vets are on their own. That was and remains a major thrust of this organization – to help wounded veterans bridge the gap between active service and disability retirement.

And even when the government benefits come through, they rarely amount to more than survival wages. The wounded veterans are rarely able to shift quickly into the private sector. In fact, many of them entered the service at a young age with little or no experience in the private sector. Anyone who has made the transition from the military to the civilian world can tell you they are two different worlds – each with its own unique challenges.

Thus, wounded veterans seeking to make the shift must first contend with their own impairment, be it physical or mental, often both. A job applicant missing limbs bears a stark burden of proof to convince prospective employers that he or she can do the job. Those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) bear an even greater burden of proof. They have difficulty contending with the normal stresses of daily work life and are subject to bouts of depression and/or disengagement.

Thus, while we welcome the slowdown in combat and a declining flow of wounded veterans returning to our country, we are finding more than enough challenge helping the wounded, especially those afflicted with PTSD, to adapt to the civilian workforce and surmount their impediments. This is a task that continues indefinitely with no slowdown in sight. And because we have spent the past several years supporting wounded veterans, it is only natural that those still struggling to adapt would call on us for help – and that we respond.

In a similar vein, the plight of caretakers – those spouses and others who take care of wounded veterans – is one that commands our attention. The Veterans Administration does provide some financial support to some caretakers, but there are periodic efforts within government to reduce it or cut it off. We are in the first line of defense against these efforts.

We have formed the Caretakers Alliance with other groups to provide a forum for supporting caretakers and defending their already limited government support. Like the challenge of PTSD itself, the need for this support will be with us for a long time.

In sum, the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes has much on its plate beyond providing direct financial aid to wounded veterans returning from the battlefields. We have much work to do and thanks to you, we are doing it. Your support is vital to our work. Working together we can continue to provide these heroes the aid and support they deserve.

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