

PROJECT ADVOCACY NEWS



Issue 2, Vol. 11 April 2020

LETTER FROM OUR VP

Greetings, and welcome to the second edition of Wounded Warrior Project's (WWP) quarterly policy update, Project Advocacy News. WWP's advocacy efforts connect wounded warriors with their elected officials, provide them with a voice, and empower them to discuss the issues that matter most to the post-9/11 veteran community.

Before talking about our Government and Community Relations efforts these past three months, I wanted to discuss how we are adjusting to the impact of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). We shifted to remote work arrangements as recommended by our nation's leaders and health care professionals and adapted our program offerings. While we have temporarily canceled or postponed our in-person events, we continue to provide virtual opportunities for warriors to connect with one another. Additionally, we continue to engage officials in the executive and legislative branches to advocate for wounded warriors and their families. Despite the disruptions posed by COVID-19, we are adapting and remaining responsive to warriors' needs.

Here's some good news — we are making progress on several important pieces of legislation focused on toxic exposures, women veteran needs, and mental health challenges.

Here are a few highlights of our recent activities:

On Jan. 17, WWP's Derek Fronabarger organized a meeting on Capitol Hill with the Toxic Exposures in the American Military (TEAM) coalition and Jon Stewart, a comedian and advocate for 9/11 responders. There, the team discussed proposed comprehensive legislation that will help veterans who have been affected by toxic exposures.

Wounded warriors traveled to Washington, DC, on Feb. 24-26 for Operation Advocacy — WWP's newest event that connects warriors with elected officials. Twenty-six warriors from 18 states held 40 meetings with members of Congress and their staff to discuss veterans' mental health and suicide prevention, women veterans' issues, and toxic exposures.

As part of Operation Advocacy, WWP CEO Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Mike Linnington testified before a joint session of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans Affairs on Feb. 26. [You can watch the entire hearing](#) and [read his submitted testimony](#).

Our Government and Community Relations team continues to grow, and we stand ready to assist. My staff and I look forward to working with you to help improve the lives of our nation's wounded veterans.

Jose Ramos
Vice President, Government and Community Relations
U.S. Navy Veteran

EVENT TRACKER

April 13 - 17: DC Soldier Ride* has been **postponed** due to COVID-19 disruptions. We will announce a new date as the situation resolves.

May 20: Our Washington Post Live event has been **postponed** due to COVID-19, and we are exploring virtual options for this forum. We will announce a new date ASAP.



Wounded Warriors in Washington, DC



WWP CEO, Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Mike Linnington

SPOTLIGHT ON #OPERATIONADVOCACY AND WWP'S CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY



It is our first priority as an organization to serve warriors and their families. We also know that when our warriors feel fully engaged in that work with us, the impact of these efforts are exponential. Operation Advocacy not only helped Wounded Warrior Project strengthen relationships with members of Congress and VA leadership, but it empowered those warriors who were hands-on in the process — giving them a direct opportunity to impact the lives of their brothers and sisters.

— WWP CEO Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Mike Linnington



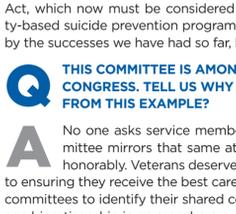
Wounded Warrior Project would like to thank the following warrior-advocates for taking time away from their jobs and families to travel to Washington, DC, to participate in our first ever #OperationAdvocacy from Feb. 24-Feb. 26.

- Sergio Alfaro - Illinois
- Justin Bednar - Indiana
- Virginia Blackmore - Tennessee
- Jeremiah Brewington - Alaska
- Charles Burton - Kentucky
- Cody Chism - Florida
- Yonari Cruz - Florida
- Graham Dorsey - Arizona
- Dawn Drake - Arizona
- Allison French - Montana
- Angela Harrison - New York
- Abbie Holland-Schmidt - Illinois
- Anton Johnson - Montana
- James Kercheval - Oklahoma
- Jerome Mitchell - Arkansas
- John Oliveira - Massachusetts
- John Palmer - California
- Ryan Pearson - New Jersey
- Darren Raines - Georgia
- Mike Rash - Texas
- Cristin Rathkopf - Washington
- Taniki Richard - Virginia
- Nicole Shorter - Illinois
- Alejandro "Hondo" Tamez - Kansas
- Pamela Travis - Virginia
- Delia Veschi - Pennsylvania

Learn more about the warriors' experience on the Hill by visiting the official Operation Advocacy [webpage](#).

MEET THE NEW CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Sen. Jerry Moran of the Great State of Kansas



CONGRATULATIONS ON ASSUMING THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS. AS THE NEW CHAIRMAN, WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES FOR THE COMMITTEE?

I am grateful to have this opportunity to serve veterans as chairman of this committee.

My main priorities include making certain that the VA MISSION Act is properly implemented so veterans have access to community care; expanding access to suicide prevention programs and mental health care; improving transition services so service members are prepared to enter the workforce; supporting women veterans; and providing oversight of the VA's performance and responsibilities.

An emerging and timely priority is to work together with the department to provide care and benefits to veterans who are affected by COVID-19 and to support the VA as it is called upon to fulfill its 4th Mission — to provide health care to our nation in the event of a health care emergency.

The committee kicked off this year with a strong start by immediately addressing some of these priorities. We passed my suicide prevention bill, the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act, which now must be considered by the full Senate. This bill would expand a veteran's access to community-based suicide prevention programs and increase access to mental health care within the VA. I am encouraged by the successes we have had so far, but there is still work to be done.

THIS COMMITTEE IS AMONG THE MOST SUCCESSFUL AND CONTINUOUSLY BIPARTISAN IN CONGRESS. TELL US WHY YOU THINK THAT IS AND WHAT OTHER COMMITTEES CAN LEARN FROM THIS EXAMPLE?

No one asks service members their affiliation when they enlist to serve and protect us, and this committee mirrors that same attitude. Their service is above politics and should be respected and treated honorably. Veterans deserve a committee that doesn't bicker about politics but upholds our commitment to ensuring they receive the best care and services that we, as a nation, can provide them. It is important for other committees to identify their shared commitments and build legislation from that viewpoint. Doing so will encourage bipartisanship in an era where our country strongly desires it.

WE APPRECIATE YOUR LEADERSHIP ON THE SPECIALLY ADAPTED HOUSING LEGISLATION FOR SERIOUSLY WOUNDED VETERANS. WHY DID YOU THINK IT WAS IMPORTANT TO SPONSOR S.2022?

Much of the policy that I sponsor in Washington is driven by casework that comes across my desk, and this bill is no different. A few years ago, Paul Benne and his wife, Christine, approached me about issues they were having with securing a VA Specially Adaptive Housing grant. Paul served in the Army for more than 20 years and was medically discharged in 2013 with a 100 percent disability rating. He was later fitted for a wheelchair and applied for the SAH grant because neither his home nor car could accommodate the wheelchair. After months of unsuccessfully working with the VA to receive this grant, the Bennes reached out to my office, and we were able to work with them to have a grant successfully awarded.

Unfortunately, Paul lost his battle to a rare degenerative disease on December 7, 2019. His loss is an even greater impetus for this bill's swift passage and implementation.

The Ryan Kules and Paul Benne Specially Adaptive Housing Improvement Act of 2019 will provide necessary assistance to service members who bear the scars of war. I am pleased that it passed the Senate in March, and I urge the House to consider this legislation so we can continue supporting disabled veterans.

IN REGARDS TO WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT'S TOP LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES, CAN YOU LAY OUT WHAT YOU THINK NEEDS TO BE DONE IN THE IMPORTANT AREAS OF VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH, TOXIC EXPOSURES, AND WOMEN VETERANS' ISSUES?

Increasing access to mental health care and addressing the suicide epidemic that is affecting veterans across the nation is one of my top priorities as chairman. The Commander John Scott Hannon Mental Health Care Improvement Act works to advance these efforts, which is why I am eager for it to be considered by the full Senate. It invests in additional research, alternative therapies, and community-based organizations to support veterans who are battling the invisible wounds of war.

Toxic exposure is a growing concern among veterans, and one that will not subside anytime soon. From our Vietnam veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange to OEF/OIF veterans and burn pits, toxic exposure is an issue that affects veterans from all conflicts. The Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs must continue to work together to coordinate reporting requirements and standards of care for those who were exposed to toxic substances. I am pleased that they have launched the Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record (ILER), a joint DoD/VA to record when and where a service member might have been exposed to a toxic substance. ILER will create a standardized framework for identifying potential exposures and help how to best care for the veteran. Programs like these are necessary to provide better care for veterans.

We must continue to support and invest in women veterans. There are approximately 2 million women veterans in the United States who have served our nation proudly and successfully. I commend the VA on its current efforts to increase access to care and benefits for women, but there is still an unintended disparity between the care men and women can receive at the VA. My suicide prevention legislation also contains provisions specifically catered to support women veterans. It specifically calls on the VA to strategically hire women in areas that are currently underrepresented.

IN FEBRUARY, WE HOSTED 26 WOUNDED WARRIORS WHO FLEW TO WASHINGTON TO SPEAK WITH THEIR ELECTED OFFICIALS. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR POST-9/11 VETERANS TO ENGAGE IN ADVOCACY?

It is extremely important for post-9/11 veterans to engage in advocacy. This collective voice is an emerging defender of veterans and their benefits. They provide a unique perspective and energy that is necessary to drive legislation, health care, and benefits forward. Their participation in this process continues a long legacy of veterans from other conflicts who have stood up for their brothers- and sisters-in-arms and fought to support veterans now and in the future. They are leading the way for those who will come after them to generate long-lasting change.

Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs Members

MAJORITY

- Chairman Jerry Moran (Kansas)
- Sen. John Boozman (Arkansas)
- Sen. Bill Cassidy (Louisiana)
- Sen. Mike Rounds (South Dakota)
- Sen. Thom Tillis (North Carolina)
- Sen. Dan Sullivan (Alaska)
- Sen. Marsha Blackburn (Tennessee)
- Sen. Kevin Cramer (North Dakota)
- Sen. Kelly Loeffler (Georgia)

MINORITY

- Ranking Member Jon Tester (Montana)
- Sen. Patty Murray (Washington)
- Sen. Bernie Sanders (Vermont)
- Sen. Sherrod Brown (Ohio)
- Sen. Richard Blumenthal (Connecticut)
- Sen. Mazie Hirono (Hawaii)
- Sen. Joe Manchin III (West Virginia)
- Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (Arizona)

★ COVID-19

At Wounded Warrior Project* (WWP), we know we are only a small part of the nationwide community effort that will get us through the spread and impact of COVID-19. This pandemic has forced many of us to adapt our roles, expectations, and priorities — and our organization is no exception. We are responding quickly to the changing circumstances and remain steadfastly committed to the WWP mission to honor and empower our nation's wounded warriors.



FINANCIAL WELLNESS
WWP committed \$10 million to help meet the immediate needs of warriors who are in financial crisis due to the coronavirus pandemic. Warriors who qualified were granted \$1,000 per household to help pay for groceries, utilities, rent or mortgage payments, and other essential expenses. Learn more about our [COVID-19 Relief Program](#).

CONNECTION
As we enter spring, warriors have been registering for Zoom conferences to learn more about gardening, photography, and lawn care, while others have joined virtual trivia nights or our exclusive online gaming Discord community.

WWP TALK
The month of March saw a 60 percent increase over our monthly average of new warriors and family support members being referred to the program. Program participants are answering our calls at higher rates than ever.



WARRIORS TO WORK*
Virtual platforms are keeping it possible for veterans to meet with prospective employers "face to face," share resumes, and compartmentalize chats within larger group engagements.

PHYSICAL HEALTH & WELLNESS
We've launched WWP Live so that warriors can benefit from livestreamed content in the categories of fitness, nutrition, wellness, cycling, and adaptive sports. And while we've had to cancel Soldier Ride* programs across the country, more than 200 would-be participants have logged over 5,000 miles in our new Strava group.

OPERATION CHECK-IN
While programs like Project Odyssey and Warrior Care Network* adjusting to meet warriors' needs, WWP has also launched Operation Check-In to reach nearly 20,000 wounded veterans and family members this month who may be experiencing additional stress.

★ A WARRIOR'S PERSPECTIVE

WHY I ADVOCATE.



US Army Staff Sgt. (Ret.) Justin Bednar, *Rensselaer, Indiana*

Wounded Warrior Project during its first Operation Advocacy. I shared my story with members of Congress and their staff, telling them about how I was wounded in Iraq when a choline vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) detonated, and how I was exposed to burn pits.

When I transitioned out of the military, there was no one to really guide me through the process; I had to figure it out on my own. Before Wounded Warrior Project was there to help, I had to represent my own claims, tell my story, and learn the process. In this journey, I learned that no one can advocate for themselves better than themselves.

When I first heard about this opportunity, I thought I could give back by telling my story. I would be in front of the very people who influence and effect change on veteran health care and veterans' benefits. Warriors who may not be able to help themselves or know where to even begin the process could look at our advocacy and see that ordinary vets like them have a voice and can be heard by our leaders.

Advocacy to me is fighting for the things that you believe in and being part of the process to effect change. I was able to be a part of that on Feb. 25 with

Since being medically retired from the Army, I don't talk much about my military service; I don't feel many could relate to it. However, it was great sharing my story with fellow warriors and legislators this past week — even therapeutic to be honest. I felt connected right away when all the warriors linked up and began to open up about their past experiences. It was an honor to be a part of such a group, making a difference and an impact that affects so many other warriors.

★ NEW STAFF

WE HAVE ADDED NEW TEAMMATES!



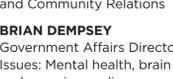
Ramsey Sulayman

Ramsey Sulayman serves as a government affairs director focused on WWP's advocacy on Department of Defense (DOD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care; DOD benefits and programs; and issues specifically related to women veterans, such as access to health care, military sexual trauma, and transition from the military. Ramsey served as an infantry officer in the Marine Corps and deployed to combat in Iraq. Ramsey has served in a variety of legislative and program management roles with other veteran service organizations, on Capitol Hill, and with defense and non-defense private sector companies. Ramsey earned a B.A. from the University of Toledo and attended graduate school there as well. He is a native of the great state of Ohio.



Aleks Morosky

Aleks Morosky supports WWP's advocacy efforts on transition, education, employment, and disability compensation issues. Prior to joining WWP, Aleks served in legislative affairs roles with the Military Order of the Purple Heart and the Veterans of Foreign Wars and was a Wounded Warrior Fellow in the U.S. House of Representatives. He served as an infantryman in the U.S. Army for one week shy of seven years, reaching the rank of staff sergeant. Aleks deployed twice to Iraq with the 101st Airborne Division and is a Purple Heart recipient. Following his military service, Aleks earned a B.A. in political science from the University of Connecticut using the GI Bill. He is a native of the great state of Connecticut.



Anne Marie McLean

Anne Marie McLean supports WWP's advocacy on mental health, brain health, and caregiver policy. Prior to joining WWP in February, Anne Marie worked in the defense industry, served in a few congressional offices, and was a Fulbright grantee in South Korea. She holds a B.A. in English from Providence College in Rhode Island. She is a native of the great state of Illinois.

★ BILL TRACKER

■ PASSED ■ PASSED DIFFERENT VERSIONS ■ NOT PASSED

Specially Adaptive Housing (SAH) S.2022/H.R.3504

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

INTRODUCED HOUSE PASSED HOUSE INTRODUCED SENATE PASSED SENATE SIGNED BY POTUS

6/26/2019

7/23/2019

6/27/2019

3/26/2020

Veterans Expedited TSA Screening Safe Travel Act S.1881/H.R.3356

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

INTRODUCED HOUSE PASSED HOUSE INTRODUCED SENATE PASSED SENATE SIGNED BY POTUS

6/19/2019

6/18/2019

9/10/2019

*Passed the House Homeland Security Committee on September 12, 2019

National Suicide Hotline Designation Act S.2661/H.R.4194

INTRODUCED HOUSE PASSED HOUSE INTRODUCED SENATE PASSED SENATE SIGNED BY POTUS

8/20/2019

10/22/2019

*The Federal Communications Commission began regulatory action on Dec. 12, 2019

Deborah Sampson Act S.514/H.R.3224

INTRODUCED HOUSE PASSED HOUSE INTRODUCED SENATE PASSED SENATE SIGNED BY POTUS

11/12/2019

3/13/2019

Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act S.785

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

INTRODUCED HOUSE PASSED HOUSE INTRODUCED SENATE PASSED SENATE SIGNED BY POTUS

3/13/2019

* Passed the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs on Jan. 29, 2020

Major Richard Star Act H.R.5995

INTRODUCED HOUSE PASSED HOUSE INTRODUCED SENATE PASSED SENATE SIGNED BY POTUS

2/27/2020

★ CONTACT US

advocacy@woundedwarriorproject.org

JOSE RAMOS
Vice President of Government and Community Relations

MEGHAN JACKSON
Government Affairs Specialist
Issues: Women veterans, electronic health records, and transition assistance programs

BRIAN DEMPSEY
Government Affairs Director
Issues: Mental health, brain health, and caregiver policy

ANNE MARIE MCLEAN
Government Affairs Specialist
Issues: Mental health, brain health, and caregiver policy

DEREK FRONABARGER
Government Affairs Director
Issues: VA benefits, toxic exposures, caregivers, and education

ALEKSANDR MOROSKY
Government Affairs Specialist
Issues: VA benefits, toxic exposures, caregivers, and education

RAMSEY SULAYMAN
Government Affairs Director
Issues: Women veterans, electronic health records, and transition assistance programs

MEDIA INQUIRIES
JOE PLENZLER
Communications Director
JPlenzler@woundedwarriorproject.org

★ RESOURCES

WWP RESOURCE CENTER

resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org
888.wwp.alum (997.2586) or 904.405.1213
Fax: 904.405.1301 | woundedwarriorproject.org

HOURS OF OPERATION
Monday - Friday
9 am - 19 pm EST

1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1

SENATE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
www.veterans.senate.gov
202-224-9126
Twitter: @VACHair

SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
www.armed-services.senate.gov
202-224-3871
Twitter: @SASCMajority

HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
<https://veterans.house.gov>
202-225-9756
Twitter: @VetAffairsDems

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
www.va.gov
844-698-2311
Twitter: @DeptVetAffairs

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
<https://armedservices.house.gov>
202-225-4151
Twitter: @HASCDemocrats

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
www.defense.gov
Twitter: @DeptofDefense