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BRANCH, UNITED STATES ARMY WOUNDED WARRIOR PROGRAM

STATEMENT BY

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Introduction

Chairman Akaka, Distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you for the opportunity to talk today on behalf of the United States Army Wounded Warrior Program.

Wounded Warrior Program

On April 30, 2004, the Department of the Army introduced an initiative to enhance the care and support of severely Wounded Warriors and their Families. This program identified the requirement for the Army to respond to the needs of the seriously wounded Soldiers from Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. Initially, the name of this initiative was the Disabled Soldier Support System, known as DS3. It was designed as a system of support to guide Wounded Warriors and Families from evacuation through treatment, rehabilitation, and possibly to return to duty or military retirement and transition into the civilian community. When I was hired as a Soldier Family Management Specialist in April 2005, I assumed duties as one of four Soldier Family Management Specialists assisting the Army's most severely wounded Soldiers and their Family members.

In November 2005, the name changed to the United States Army Wounded Warrior (AW2) Program. This change occurred to recognize that the Army's Wounded Warriors did not consider themselves to be "disabled" but rather self-sufficient, contributing members of our

communities. The United States AW2 Program embodies the Warrior Ethos "we will never leave a fallen comrade."

The personalized support that is provided by a Soldier Family Management Specialist to a Wounded Warrior and his/her Family is not limited by geography or physical location and is not constrained by recovery or rehabilitation timelines. A Soldier Family Management Specialist will provide services to that Soldier and Family for as long as it takes.

To be eligible for the United States AW2 Program, a Soldier must suffer from injuries or illnesses in support of the Global War on Terror sustained after September 10, 2001. He or she must receive, or expect to receive a 30% or greater Army disability rating for one or more injuries by the Physical Disability Evaluation System. These injuries include categories such as: loss of vision/blindness; loss of limb; spinal cord injury/paralysis; permanent disfigurement; severe burns; traumatic brain injury; post traumatic stress disorder and other fatal/incurable disease. Through the expert leadership of the United States Wounded Warrior Program, our mission is to cut through red tape and assist our Soldiers and their Families as they navigate federal, state and private benefit systems. Soldier Family Management Specialists are the "boots on the ground" linking Wounded Warriors and Families with selected financial, educational, employment, legal and medical resources. We strive to be effective change agents, continually implementing lessons learned to adjust policy and increase the responsiveness and effectiveness of our medical and benefit systems and partners.

The United States AW2 Program's footprint is now throughout major Army Military Treatment Facilities, Veterans Affairs Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers and VA Polytrauma Network Sites. In less than

three years, the United States AW2 Program has expanded to 80 Soldier Family Management Specialists throughout the United States. As of November 2007, AW2 has four regional SFMS supervisors.

In March 2007, the Program initiated and deployed the Wounded Warrior Accountability System (WWAS), which is the "gold-standard" and has no peer in the military or civilian sectors. WWAS is a system that has combined data from 12 Legacy systems and provides AW2 Soldier Family Management Specialists with the ability to track, monitor and manage our Soldiers and Families. The Soldier Family Management Specialist documents all interactions with AW2 Soldiers and their Families in the call log capability of WWAS.

The United States AW2 Program worked with Army G-1 to develop the AW2 Benefits Calculator which provides AW2 Soldiers a financial comparison of continued military service versus medical retirement. This tool is one of many utilized by the Soldier Family Management Specialist to assist the transitioning Soldier and Family.

The United States AW2 Program and Soldier Family Management Specialists were instrumental in establishing and training the Wounded Soldier Family Hotline for all Army wounded, injured and ill Soldiers; utilizing lessons learned and experience gained from working with the Army's most severely injured. AW2 has participated in many of the Army's transformation initiatives such as the Physical Disability Evaluation System transformation, the Army Medical Action Plan (AMAP) and the OSD Senior Oversight Committee Lines of Action. As we implement all pertinent aspects of the 2008 NDAA including improvements to case management and supporting the PDE pilot program, AW2 SFMS's will continue to improve the treatment of Soldiers and Families across the continuum of care.

In June 2006, AW2 held its first symposium, based on the well-established Army Family Action Plan. This forum allowed AW2 Soldiers and Family Members to identify and prioritize systemic issues, some of which are the basis for many of the transformation efforts. Two additional symposiums followed with a fourth symposium scheduled for June 2008.

The level of service provided by the Soldier Family Management Specialists ranges from assisting a severely wounded Soldier to obtaining a full restitution from the Army Board for Correction of Military Records in less than 6 months to assisting a wounded warrior and Family find the resources to pay an electrical bill. Typical achievements by Soldier Family Management Specialists include assisting medically retired Soldiers with TSGLI appeals. In some case these resulted in a \$50,000 award to the Soldier. Additionally these critical SFMSs assist medically retired Soldiers, some with severe traumatic brain injuries to negotiate and be released from binding monetary liability contracts. They have assisted in initiating financial audits resulting in discoveries of erroneous Survivor Benefit Plan deductions for single Soldiers and then coordinated with the Retirement Service Office to reimburse the entire amount back to the Soldiers. These Specialists have met with Families of AW2 Soldiers as they faced difficult end-of-life decisions for the Soldiers. They have coordinated Homecoming Celebrations for multiple AW2 Soldiers, assisted with Social Security applications and appeals for AW2 Soldiers, coordinated Purple Heart Ceremonies for medically retired, comatose Soldiers at their homes and countless other services for our most severely wounded warriors.

As of January 2008, we have 26 Soldier Family Management Specialists working within Veterans Affairs Medical Centers, providing AW2 services to the Army's most severely wounded Soldiers and Families. We thank the Department of Veterans Affairs for providing us office space and support to continue our mission.

We plan to increase the number of Soldier Family Management Specialists at VA facilities as our AW2 population grows. In addition, we plan to further improve our training program, utilizing lessons learned to enhance our service delivery to our Wounded Warriors and their Families. We will continue to oversee the program qualities and efficiencies for our Soldiers and Families to obtain the benefits and services for which they are entitled. We will never leave a fallen comrade. From April 2004 onward, the United States AW2 Program has been and remains a vital and growing program. It is the Army's official program for providing advocacy and support to our most severely injured and ill Soldiers and their Families. Currently, the program is tracking more than 2500 Soldiers and remains relevant and critical to our Army. AW2 assisted 59 Soldiers to Continue on Active Duty or in an Active Reserve Status (COADICOAR). In conjunction with the Soldier's Career Managers at the Army Human Resources Command, Soldier Family Management Specialists have helped in developing a 5 Year Plan for each COADICOAR Soldier. Finally, AW2 and the Soldier Family Management Specialists are actively engaged in the implementation of a Pilot Program with the National Organization on Disabilities (NOD). This program will align an employment expert with a Soldier Family Management Specialist enhancing their ability to assist our Soldiers seeking employment.

The Army is grateful for the support it has received throughout the Department of Defense and from other Federal agencies to improve the care, treatment, and services provided for our wounded warriors and their families. While much progress in this noble effort has been made, more can and should be done. The Army supports the initiatives to include the proposed Dole/Shalala legislative reforms to help our wounded warriors as they transition from DOD to VA.

In conclusion, the AW2 Program is vital and necessary to our most critically injured Soldiers. As someone involved in the program from its earliest inception, without hesitation I can assure you it is heading in the right direction and for the right reasons. I thank you for your time and look forward to your questions.