

Wounded Warrior Project™ Announces 2012 Legislative Objectives in Testimony Before House, Senate Committees on Veterans Affairs

Washington, D.C. (March 21, 2012) – Wounded Warrior Project™ (WWP) whose mission is to honor and empower wounded warriors, today presented its 2012 policy priorities before the Committees on Veterans Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives.

Dawn Halfaker, President of WWP's Board of Directors and a Wounded Warrior herself, testified before this joint session and shared the four key policy objectives of WWP in 2012:

- Closing gaps and eliminating barriers to improved mental health of warriors and their families and caregivers;
- Fostering the economic empowerment of Wounded Warriors through policy initiatives to eliminate educational and employment barriers;
- Helping ensure access to optimal, long-term rehabilitative care for severely Wounded Warriors, and needed support for their caregivers;
- Improving the effectiveness of programs that were established to help Wounded Warriors and their families' transition from active duty to successful community reintegration.

A graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Halfaker sacrificed her right arm and suffered numerous other wounds while leading troops in combat in Baquba, one of the most volatile cities in Iraq's dangerous Diyala Province.

She pressed the importance of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) providing timely, effective mental health care. "We certainly acknowledge that VA has made real efforts in recent years to improve mental health care, and that there are many very able, caring mental health professionals in the system," Halfaker said. "But too many warriors are falling through the cracks and the gaps between policy and practice remain too wide."

Halfaker also discussed the results of an annual WWP survey of alumni revealing the challenges Wounded Warriors face when living with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other invisible wounds of war. The annual survey of 5,800 wounded warriors saw more than 2,300 respond with some alarming figures considering the difficulty in receiving proper mental healthcare:

- 78 percent self-identified as having symptoms of a combat-related mental health condition;
- 51 percent reported having experienced a traumatic brain injury;
- More than 36 percent of respondents said "yes" when asked if they had had difficulty getting mental health care, or put off getting such care or did not get the care they needed.

"Wounded Warrior Project looks forward to working with the House and Senate Committees on the objectives presented in our 2012 policy agenda," said Steven Nardizzi, executive director, WWP. "So many of our Warriors have not only suffered multiple wounds – physical and emotional – but face multiple challenges, including uneven access to care, gaps in treatment and barriers to achieving economic empowerment. We hope to work together in addressing the changes necessary in order to foster the most successful and well-adjusted generation of wounded warriors in our nation's history."

The full 2012 policy agenda can be located on the WWP website at www.woundedwarriorproject.org under the Policy and Government Affairs section.

The mission of Wounded Warrior Project™ (WWP) is to honor and empower wounded warriors. WWP's purpose is to raise awareness and to enlist the public's aid for the needs of injured service members, to help injured servicemen and women aid and assist each other, and to provide unique, direct programs and services to meet their needs. WWP is a national, nonpartisan organization headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida. To get involved and learn more, visit woundedwarriorproject.org.

<https://newsroom.woundedwarriorproject.org/2012-03-21-Wounded-Warrior-Project-Announces-2012-Legislative-Objectives-in-Testimony-Before-House-Senate-Committees-on-Veterans-Affairs>