Wounded Warrior Project Announces 2013 Legislative Objectives in Testimony Before House, Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs

Washington, DC (Feb. 28,2013) – Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP), whose mission is to honor and empower wounded warriors, today presented its 2013 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 2013:

- 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 government programs that ware 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 commanded the committees for working closely with WWP to enact legislation that expanded the scope of required rehabilitative care for veterans with traumatic brain injury (TBI), while also helping to lay the groundwork for the enactment of strong mental health provisions, and for successfully pressing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to add peer-support services for wounded warriors to its mental health workforce.

Halfaker acknowledged that there is still more work to be done, pressing for a collaborative effort to ensure wounded warriors thrive with a successful transition to civilian life, urging the committees to take immediate action in light of the recent announcement of an earlier drawdown of troop levels in Afghanistan.

“Many of our wounded warriors and their families continue to face challenges on their path to recovery,” Halfaker testified. “Let me emphasize that WWP is not simply here to cite problems. Rather, we strive to propose solutions, as well as develop programs of our own to meet warriors' and caregivers' needs. With the drawdown of forces in Afghanistan, more service members will be transitioning to veteran status and the challenge of engaging warriors and providing effective mental health care will continue to grow.”

During her testimony, Halfakar 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 13,000 WWP Alumni saw more than 5,600 respond with some alarming figures considering the difficulty in receiving effective mental healthcare:

- 69% screened positive for PTSD.
- 49% reported having experienced a traumatic brain injury.
- 1 in 3 respondents reported that mental health issues made it difficult to obtain employment or hold jobs.

"Wounded Warrior Project looks forward to working with the House and Senate Committees, as well as the VA and Executive Branch Departments on the objectives presented in our 2013 legislative agenda," said Steve Nardizzi, executive director, Wounded Warrior Project. “WWP has clear priorities that reflect the very real experiences of the warriors, family members and caregivers that we engage every day. The priorities for 2013 that we have presented today echo our commitment to confront the systemic barriers to the successful reintegration these warriors face."

About Wounded Warrior Project

Since 2003, Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) has been meeting the growing needs of warriors, their families, and caregivers — helping them achieve their highest ambition. Learn more.

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