

Spencer Almy

## Veterans Affairs

If only a fraction of the population of a Democratic Nation is called to serve and defend that democracy, what does the nation as a whole owe to its defenders? That this nation has an active duty military to protect the privileges of the many is a necessity to sustain our way of life but it is our responsibility to repay their service with help and care when they return home. This responsibility varies from respecting the men and women who have served to providing care and assistance to them after they return home from combat to ease their transition into civilian life. It is our duty as American citizens to look out for and provide for our veterans after they return home from combat.

The United States spends \$29 billion a year on compensation for injured veterans. To put this in perspective, it spends \$92 billion on corporate welfare over the same period of time. This discrepancy in the way the government spends money is especially noteworthy when the reasoning behind the expenditures is considered. To receive corporate welfare there are very few qualifications that need to be met. A corporation can receive subsidies for staying below a threshold of pollution, planting certain crops, or even just being a large enough company. These subsidies are handed out fairly liberally and with very few questions asked. In contrast, there are many regulations and qualifications that need to be met by wounded soldiers in order to receive compensation for their injuries. For instance, if a sergeant dives for cover during a mortar attack and breaks his or her knee it is only considered a combat injury if they were struck by shrapnel during the combat. These minor roadblocks to receiving compensation for injuries received while serving in the armed forces makes it very

difficult for veterans who are in dire need of help to receive the benefits which they need in order to recover from the wounds they received. This remarkable difference in the ease of receiving help from the government shows just how difficult it is for veterans to obtain the help they deserve after a career of service and need to recover from the injuries they incurred during conflict. This allows the government to spend far less on veterans when there is a more pressing need in this area.

The pool of veterans who are even allowed to seek help from the government is also severely limited by the the strict definitions of a combat injury. Only a fraction of those injured in combat are eligible for assistance by the government. It is particularly challenging for veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq who are surviving injuries, because of medical advancements, that were once life ending. These injuries are not necessarily readily apparent directly after the combat mission they were sustained in or immediately after returning home. Injuries such as hearing loss, chronic fatigue syndrome, depression, fibromyalgia, hepatitis A, B and C, malaria, memory loss, migraines, sleep disorders and tuberculosis are often diagnosed years after the exposure in a combat zone occurred. This leaves veterans vulnerable to worsening health issues throughout their lives without the medical care desperately needed to lead productive lives.

Chronic medical conditions are incredibly expensive and restrictive medical benefits for veterans leaves them vulnerable to a continued reduction in quality of life. Returning to civilian life is now understood to be a far more difficult process than society believed it to be after earlier wars. This reintegration process is made even more difficult when chronic, untreated injuries and their symptoms are not properly cared for. Veterans are asked to take the brunt of battle both on the field of combat and then in

their own communities once during their adjustment process. This lack of support for our nation's service members is a great issue that needs to be addressed at a national and individual level.

As a nation it is the government's duty to honor and help the men and women who defended the way of life that has existed for the entire history of America. Without sufficient support of the small minority of citizens who are willing to sacrifice everything to defend the beliefs and ideals which have been fostered here throughout history this nation will no longer be able to exist. The government needs to increase its spending on aid to all veterans, especially those who have suffered bodily harm, and stop turning away individuals who are in dire need of help. However, the obligation to help veterans after they return home does not fall solely on the government. The citizens who these brave individuals fought to defend also owe them a great deal. It is our duty as Americans to help our veterans return home. We can do this through the way we interact in public, vote in elections and by simply being respectful to the veterans in our community. It is our challenge at every level of this nation to do these things in order to provide the best possible existence for the people who have given so much to us.