



January 26, 2018

*Prioritizing our Military Budget –Funding Care of our Troops & Veterans Fully*

What our heroes need are significant increases in funds spent to care for them when they return home with emotional and/or physical wounds and new focus. These actions are critical to confront the 22-24 daily suicides whose number has not changed for over 17 years of our work in the trenches by any verifiable measurable amount.

◆ What our troops and veterans need are appointments available every week when counseling is needed not every 2-3 months. This entails hiring more qualified and well paid mental health clinicians that are at the very least Masters' Level. This means our country's investment in offering the best of care to our military when they come home. Our clinicians should be flocking to Veterans Hospitals to apply for jobs caring for our nation's treasure.

◆ What our troops and veterans need are all valuable therapies offered with every single Veterans' Hospital to include art, music, meditation, yoga, mindfulness, equine, outdoor sport challenges, Anger Management workshops, Group Therapy for PTSD, Grief & Loss, Drug and Alcohol Recovery, Couples Therapy, Divorce & Starting Over Again, workshops on Parenting, Surviving Sexual Assault, and Coping with Numerous Deployments. These are just the basics that we have found are needed at every Hospital based on surveys and research.

Every veteran is an individual responding to different therapies when diagnosed with any mental health challenges with the goal of becoming mentally fit again able to live a quality life.

◆ What our troops and veterans need is better screening up to 6 months including an assigned "Buddy to Buddy" mentor to ensure that they are feeling well and adjusting back to being home in all ways successfully. Teach



the mentors the red flags. Work daily on reducing stigma of accessing mental health resources. Troops with PTSD and Depression are being sent back into world conflicts, re-deployed. Is that safe for everyone in the unit including the deployed service-member? Who determines this ?

◆ Our troops whenever feasible logistically, need therapy dogs accompanying them on assignments overseas as we have seen in very few US Air Force units. We have witnessed the beneficial effects of having dogs alongside medical staff at Bagram Air Field with their exceptional hospital there for patients and devoted stressed medical staff . We have supported these heroes from Homefront Hugs Foundation for nearly 2 decades.. Just having a therapy animal to “ be there” (latest slogan from DOD in 2017 to try to prevent suicide) leaves a positive physiological and psychological difference for all.

◆ What all military branches must begin to do is to prepare our troops for the effects and possible psychological wounds of war including long deployments . This has been exemplified by the US Marines who are implementing training in meditation, mindfulness therapy and stress management before a Marine ever leaves US soil on deployment. Giving our men and women in uniform the tools to manage potential psychological wounds is critical.

◆ What our troops and veterans need is fast research approved and directed by our president to Veterans Affairs regarding medical marijuana treatment for chronic pain and PTSD to help reduce suicides as proposed again just this week by Representative Tim Walz. We know as well that legal marijuana has been found to reduce the deaths of men and women affected by the Opioid Crisis which includes our veterans sadly .

◆ What our troops and veterans need are service and therapy dogs issued like combat boots and medication during and after deployments. The effects of having a service/therapy dog are almost endless for our wounded veterans and help reduce and prevent emotional/mental health wounds during deployments. They provide unconditional support during and between medical and mental health appointments, easing the transition home as well . The



research and simple data of their benefits whether a service member is physically or psychologically wounded or both , already has demonstrated a reduction in negative stress, anxiety, PTSD symptoms, depression, and an increase of the most basic human need: sleep. Service animals are shown to improve entire family dynamics easing tension, emotional and physical pain. In fact, when medical staff agrees that a service animal is warranted, and prescribed one

Private charities have raised millions only to provide 2-6 therapy or service dogs per YEAR with waiting lists are up to 5 years. When thousands of troops and veterans need this healing, they cannot afford to wait.

Funds must be invested to raise and train these dogs by the Dept of Defense itself just as it trains military working dogs . This would be an ideal assignment for troops after long traumatic deployments as well.

These therapy dogs will in turn do what already individual ones have been reported to have accomplished – reducing suicides of our active duty troops and veterans.

When a military member takes his or her life, the suffering of loved ones is immeasurable but we must never forget this lifelong pain left on too many of our citizens, especially children, siblings and spouses. They are left behind to endure the pain of suicide and wonder why often blaming themselves . This must become a national priority and labeled the crisis it is as we speak of allocating any taxpayer funds. We can cite endless examples of suicide and the lack of timely and appropriate intervention for mental health issues related to in-service experiences due to battles against ISIS, Al Qaeda, but including sexual assault, drug and alcohol addiction, and the stressors of numerous long deployments away from loved ones who need them.

◆ What our troops, veterans and families need is a national campaign to reduce the stigma of getting help for mental challenges. We must change verbiage to maintaining MENTAL FITNESS which will appeal to the biggest skeptics. Already our fine allies in the United Kingdom with their esteemed



organization to face mental fitness head on, Heads Together, are skillfully involving their entire country in the battle to save lives.

◆ We must ask ourselves the following questions :

- When we speak of military budgets and spending, does this include our suicide crisis and making our Veterans Hospitals the best they can be?
- Is there enough choice and guidance to outside resources?  
What matters more -a veteran's life or a wall ?
- When we lose 22-24 per day are we remembering to fly our flags half staff until this daily roll ends? Is a loss in combat not the same as a loss in combat of emotional wounds ?
- Can we make a simple fix of adding the Suicide Hotline on the back of ALL military IDs and driver's' licenses to make the number as accessible as possible for all US Citizens : 1-800-273-8255 ?
- Can we accept that these daily suicides deserve more than a " Suicide Prevention Month" where dictated comments and slogans are failing to reduce and end these daily tragic deaths?
- Since the military is now reaching out with a new campaign called " Getting to Know Your Military " due to the military/civilian divide, can we involve our citizens in helping to reach out to our heroes and contribute to reducing the stigma of mental challenges exemplifying the strength and courage of asking for help? We must be frank with what our troops face when they volunteer to serve and the suicide crisis.

These are our fellow citizens who volunteer to serve. When we treat our heroes with dignity and the best medical and mental health care available before, during and after deployments, we value their sacrifices with more than words



and citizens will continue to volunteer to serve. When we fail our heroes, we fail to honor their sacrifices, we fail their families and loved ones, and we fail our nation. Retention and recruitment rates will also plummet as it will take more than monetary bonuses to recruit and retain those who wish to serve our beloved country . No one wishes to see the draft return either. We must all wake up to the reality of the daily suicides with our veterans and active duty troops. The time for push-ups is over.

Sincerely in peace, Shalom.

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