

## STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

For

United States Senate

Committee on Armed Services

Wounded Warrior Policy and Programs

I am Colleen Rivas, the wife of Lieutenant Colonel Raymond T. Rivas (Retired). I would like to share my views and experiences of the past few years as well as discuss the challenges that lie ahead for my family as we deal with the Traumatic Brain Injury that my husband received two and a half years ago in Iraq.

One of the issues that I feel very strongly about is the comparison being made between Traumatic Brain Injury and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. In my opinion there are profound differences between these two injuries. TBI is a physical trauma that can range from mild to severe. PTSD is an emotional trauma which can have debilitating effects. I have dealt firsthand with both of these traumas where Raymond is concerned; PTSD more so after Afghanistan which was in the form of nightmares and some depression. What we could not deal with on our own he was able to obtain help with through the VA in the form of counseling. The Traumatic Brain Injury has been an entirely different matter. When Raymond first returned to the U.S. he was sent to Brooke Army Medical Center. He suffered from severe headaches that painkillers and brain blocks had no affect on. In addition to the headaches, he had trouble with his balance, his depth perception, his speech, his eye to hand coordination, his memory, which included both his long- term and short- term and any task that involved sequencing. He was unable to go anywhere by himself because he was constantly getting lost. It took a year for him to regain his balance and depth perception. Now, two and a half years later, he still suffers from daily headaches, however their severity has lessened. He has regained most of his long-term memory; however he still has trouble with his short-term memory which includes misplacing items on a daily basis and constant repetition of subjects previously discussed. In addition, he cannot follow a detailed set of instructions nor can he multi-task. His condition is frustrating for both him and our family.

Another issue that I feel very strongly about is the transition of the soldier from the battlefield back to civilian life. One thing that I have noticed over the years with Raymond's numerous deployments is the difficulty of transitioning back to everyday life and the stresses that go along with family and work. In my opinion, some sort of decompression time needs to be built in to

“time served” so that soldiers can get readjusted to civilian life. I feel like reservists especially have it hard because their deployments are longer and when they are released from active duty, they go right back into their civilian jobs. Some injuries such as mild TBI as well as PTSD may not be apparent until months later. In addition to an assessment as soon as the soldier returns home, some type of reassessment should be done several months later. It is after the soldier returns home and the honeymoon period is over that a lot of the problems begin. Furthermore, if any type of combat action was seen then counseling should be mandatory for the soldier and the family. Soldiers need to understand that their families will never fully understand what they have been through because the family member will never have that experience, and families need to understand that the soldier they sent off to war may not be the same soldier that they get back. For our family, the worst adjustment period was after Afghanistan. Raymond saw a lot of action due to the fact that he was stationed at a Special Forces Fire Base and when he returned from active duty he went straight back into a stressful job and a house full of teenagers. The stress of trying to readjust to civilian life almost destroyed our entire family. I strongly feel that mandatory counseling for him and our family would have made the transition much easier.

It has been a long two and a half years with a lot of ups and downs. Based on reports from military and VA neurologists some type of long-term care will be needed in the next five years. Fortunately, we are working with many good private as well as government organizations that can help us with what lies ahead.

Most Sincerely Yours,

Colleen O. Rivas