

**REVIEWING THE PROGRESS OF THE PARTNERSHIP
BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES PARALYMPICS
AND THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS
AFFAIRS TO PROMOTE ADAPTIVE SPORTS**

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS

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**PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED
STATES PARALYMPICS AND THE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS
AFFAIRS TO PROMOTE ADAPTIVE SPORTS**

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2011

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY,
Washington, DC.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:02 a.m., in Room 340, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Marlin A. Stutzman [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Stutzman, Braley, and Walz.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN STUTZMAN

Mr. STUTZMAN. Good morning and welcome everyone to the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity.

This Committee's first responsibility to our veterans is to enable those injured in military service and to have the broadest opportunity to rehabilitate themselves, and that is what today's oversight hearing is all about. So I appreciate everyone being here and looking forward to the testimony this morning.

While I was not a Member of the 110th Congress, one of the legislative bright spots was the provision in Public Law 110-389 that established the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)-U.S. Paralympics Adaptive Sports Program, an initiative to expand the use of sports as part of a veterans rehabilitation programs.

To do that, the law authorizes \$8 million per year to fund veteran adaptive sports programs from the local level through elite levels of competition. The law limits use of the funds to disabled veterans and servicemembers and includes a provision to pay a per diem to those selected to participate in high-level adaptive sports competitions.

There was a good reason to direct VA to partner with U.S. Paralympics, and that was to use the cache of the Olympic brand and the ability to attract local and national organizations.

Just as important, we saw how the Olympic brand would attract disabled veterans to adaptive sports.

Given what we will hear today, that strategy has worked very well. It appears that thousands more disabled veterans are now involved in adaptive sports and at the elite levels, as well in our national Paralympic and adaptive sports teams that now include many more disabled veterans. It seems the program is also fos-

tering further cooperation between adaptive sports clubs and programs at the local and at the national level.

While the Paralympics has yet to draw the viewership like the Olympics, I believe the next steps would be to expand media coverage, and I would ask Mr. Huebner to include their media plans in his remarks this morning.

In short, I believe the VA–U.S.Paralympics program is the right thing at the right time and that is why I have introduced H.R. 2345, which extends this program through 2018. And I am very happy that we were able to favorably report H.R. 2345 to the full Committee back in July, and I look forward to its consideration at the full Committee.

Before I recognize the Ranking Member, I believe it is important to mention the role of recreational therapy as part of rehabilitation.

When staff visited a Midwestern VA medical center and asked the director about the hospital’s recreation therapy program, the reply was, “we don’t have Bingo here.” I find that myopic view of a well-documented rehabilitation resource incredible and I intend to speak with Chairwoman Buerkle about taking a look at VA’s national recreational therapy program or lack of a program. If nothing else, it should be a major source of participants for the VA–Paralympic program.

So at this time, I would like to recognize the distinguished Ranking Member, Mr. Braley, for his opening remarks.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Stutzman appears on p. 38.]

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BRUCE L. BRALEY

Mr. BRALEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Since the beginning of time, competition has been in our DNA and it has always been a part of the warrior ethos, and the great thing about this Paralympics program is that it allows individuals who have served their country with honor and distinction and who have suffered wounds that have changed their outlook on their own lives the opportunity to continue to compete and inspire others with their performance, and that is why I am so glad to be here with you today holding this important hearing.

Since the early years in our country, Congress has had to reassess programs created to care for our men and women in uniform, our veterans who have courageously answered the call to duty, and their families who have shared in that military experience. Congress stands united in support of our members of the Armed Forces and veterans who deserve the best resources we can mustard to help them succeed in life after they complete their military service.

Paralympics sports have been used as a method of adaptive sports therapy since World War II when my father served.

Paralympics continue to provide rehabilitation services to our disabled servicemembers who continue to use them successfully and these services have proven to be popular.

And I might add, Mr. Chairman, my brother, Brian Braley, works at the VA Hospital in Des Moines, Iowa, as a kinesiotherapist working with veterans to help them get back on a path toward achieving their full level of functioning, and that is why I am so proud to be a part of this Committee.

Today's hearing will give the Subcommittee the opportunity to hear from the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC), how the Paralympics program was first authorized, as the Chairman did on October 10th of 2008, and how it has assisted our members of the service and veterans to heal from the wounds of war.

We know that the price of war is not paid for by money alone. Servicemembers that are called upon to serve on behalf of our country pay in many ways and they often pay the ultimate price. This is especially true for those who have made the sacrifice of life and injury sustained while in service, and I am very proud to welcome Mike Boone, the Director of Adaptive Sports Iowa who is here to testify today.

In March, his organization hosted a forum that brought people together interested in increasing opportunities for persons with physical and visual disabilities to be active in daily physical activity programs.

And I am also happy to welcome Clarence Hudson who is the Executive Director of Iowa Sports Foundation, who I just met and am very honored to have with us today.

Although I was unable to attend this forum, my staff was there and has provided great feedback on the work Adaptive Sports Iowa is doing and how positively it impacts physically disabled athletes.

I also had the opportunity recently to meet with Andy Yohe from Bendorf, Iowa, who is a member of Team USA sled hockey team and in 2006 helped his team win a bronze medal at the Paralympics Winter Games in Torino, Italy. Then he helped the U.S. capture gold at the 2010 Paralympics Winter Games in Vancouver, Canada. Ironically he was accompanied at that meeting by U.S. Olympic gymnast and fellow Iowan, Shawn Johnson, who has been a tremendous advocate on behalf of the Paralympics. Shawn earned a gold medal and three silver medals at the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing.

Many of my colleagues agree that the Department of Veterans Affairs provides world-class care to our injured servicemembers and veterans. Knowing this, I would like to hear about the VA and USOC Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and its implementation. I am very interested to see if there have been any issues of concern in the partnership process, and I would also like to hear about program outreach to veterans and other veterans organizations that could help coordinate important events such as the National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

As always, I look forward to working with you and your staff, Mr. Chairman, to ensure that this program continues to be successful in its mission to provide rehabilitative sports therapy to our injured servicemembers and our veterans.

And I will yield back.

[The prepared statement of Congressman Braley appears on p. 38.]

Mr. STUTZMAN. Thank you, Ranking Member Braley, and I now call up our first panel.

Our first panel is composed of Colonel Richard Cardillo, Jr, from the U.S. Army, retired from the United States Association of Blind Veterans, Mr. Michael Boone from Adaptive Sports in Iowa. Welcome. Ms. Tina Acosta from the Turnstone Center for Children and

Adults with Disabilities in Ft. Wayne, Indiana. Mr. Kirk Bauer from Disabled Sports USA, and finally Mr. Carl Blake from Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA).

I want to extend a special welcome to Ms. Acosta from Ft. Wayne, Indiana. We had the chance to meet last night, and some of the stories that she shared with us are quite inspiring and the work that they are doing is very encouraging, and I know that the work that she is doing in Ft. Wayne in my district is something to be very proud of. So welcome and thank you for coming.

The story she also is going to share with us, I hope, about a veteran from Indiana is also a wonderful story I think the Committee will appreciate.

So Colonel Cardillo, I think we will start with you. If you would like to go ahead and share your testimony, then we will go to Mr. Boone and down the line from there.

STATEMENTS OF COLONEL RICHARD G. CARDILLO, JR., USA, (RET.), MILITARY SPORT PROGRAM COORDINATOR, U.S. ASSOCIATION OF BLIND ATHLETES; MICHAEL CHARLES BOONE, DIRECTOR, ADAPTIVE SPORTS IOWA, IOWA SPORTS FOUNDATION, AMES, IA; TINA ACOSTA, MS, TR, DIRECTOR, ADULT DAY SERVICES AND ADAPTIVE SPORTS AND RECREATION, TURNSTONE CENTER FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES, FT. WAYNE, IN, AND SECRETARY, INDIANA ASSOCIATION OF ADULT DAY SERVICES; KIRK M. BAUER, J.D., USA (RET.), EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DISABLED SPORTS USA; AND CARL BLAKE, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR, PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

STATEMENT OF COLONEL RICHARD G. CARDILLO, JR., USA, (RET.)

Colonel CARDILLO. Great. Good morning, Mr. Braley, Mr. Stutzman, other Members of the panel.

The United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA) is a Colorado-based nonprofit organization that has provided life-enriching sports opportunities for children, youth, and adults who are blind and visually impaired for the past 35 years.

Through our partnership with the United States Olympic Committee, USABA has strengthened the collective effort to enhance the lives of disabled veterans and disabled members of the Armed Forces who are blind and visually impaired in order to enhance their rehabilitation process through sport, physical activity, and recreation, and most importantly to assist them in the reintegration back into their home communities.

I would like to thank you for this opportunity to present our views on the partnership and progress between the USOC Paralympics Division and the Department of Veterans Affairs in promoting adaptive sports for our Nation's veterans.

This morning I would like to explain what this initiative has meant to USABA, and more importantly, to highlight some of the accomplishments and the impact this has had over the past 3 years.

First off, we have grown our mission vision programming efforts from a start of 19 veterans back in 2008 to over 300 veterans

today, and those same veterans are living at home and training in local community-based fitness centers around the United States.

Many of these veterans have recognized the health benefits that physical activity has on improving their daily lives, and a select few of those veterans have been able to take their level of physical activity and skills to a higher level through the U.S. Paralympic Emerging Athlete Program in hopes of making the U.S. Paralympic National Team.

For example, Chester Triplett, United States Army, a veteran out of Mooresville, North Carolina, recently participated at the U.S. Track National Championships in tandem cycling for the first time. He began cycling less than 2 years ago. Well, he won the 200 meter sprint and he placed second in the kilo, and more importantly he qualified to attend the World Track Nationals in Los Angeles in February. So he is probably one of our more elite athletes at the other end of the spectrum.

Through our Military Sport Program we work directly with the VA staff at 9 of the existing 13 Blind Rehabilitation Centers in an effort to enhance the rehabilitation programs at those centers by assisting them in connecting with local community-based programs, and in some cases, Paralympic sport clubs.

Some examples are the Southeastern Blind Rehab Center in Birmingham, Alabama, has a very close relationship with the Lakeshore Foundation; another nonprofit organization, also a Paralympic sport club, and they take veterans on a weekly basis predominately to improve their strength and physical fitness.

The Western Blind Rehab Center in Palo Alto, California, has a tremendous weekly relationship with a local tandem cycling club and they take their veterans out cycling once a week, perhaps even twice a week in some cases, and they are also in the developmental stages of partnering with the Riekes Center for Human Enhancement; another local community-based organization, which also happens to be another Paralympic sport club.

And finally, at the American Lakes Rehab Center in Tacoma, Washington, they have a golfing program with a local golfing organization, and they are working to expand their program with the Tacoma Parks and Recreation and a local rowing program.

We have worked closely with the Department of Veterans Affairs over the past 2 years on immersing select Veteran Affairs blind rehabilitation center staff into our summer sports program in a train-the-trainer program; the adaptive sports programming knowledge that these individuals gain is easily transferable back into their own recreational and rehabilitation efforts.

We continuously expand existing programming efforts to include greater veteran participation at our summer and winter sports programs and other developmental and learn to race cycling camps.

We encourage and assist veteran participation at community-based programming being offered around the United States.

And I see my time is slowly running out so I will quickly jump to our recommendations. We have three. And those three involve working with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Vision Center of Excellence.

Our first recommendation is to ease the identification and sharing of contact information so that we can better assist these vet-

erans as they become known to learn more about the programming efforts and the rehabilitation efforts around the United States.

Secondly, we would like to re-establish the funding stream from the VA to allow for the continuation of support and services to the Blind Rehabilitation Centers.

And our third recommendation, we would like to see an expansion of the current on-going programming efforts to include the spouse and family member integration into those rehabilitation programs.

For the past 53 years, I have known all too well the importance that the military family plays and the impact that it has on the servicemember, and we believe that the inclusion of those individuals in that rehabilitation program effort is important to the rehabilitation of that veteran.

I truly would just like to say thank you for giving us the opportunity to present our thoughts, and if I had more time, and I can wait till the end, there is a letter attached as Exhibit A from one of our recent program participants that very clearly articulates the impact that the program had on his life, and I believe that I can speak for the rest of the veterans that it has on their lives as well.

[The prepared statement of Colonel Cardillo appears on p. 39.]

Mr. STUTZMAN. Thank you. And feel free to share more comments during the questions that we have.

Colonel CARDILLO. Okay.

Mr. STUTZMAN. So we definitely want to hear what you have to say. So Colonel—

Colonel CARDILLO. Great.

Mr. STUTZMAN [continuing]. Thank you.

Mr. Boone, you are recognized.

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL CHARLES BOONE

Mr. BOONE. Chairman Stutzman, Ranking Member Braley, and Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate and am humbled to appear before you today to discuss the partnership between the U.S. Paralympics and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I personally have never had the honor to serve within the military. As a citizen of this country, I cannot express enough the gratitude I have for the sacrifice the honorable men and women of our Armed Forces make.

As a professional in the adaptive sports industry, I realized that I can have an impact on the lives of those who have come home with a physical disability. The opportunities I can provide will have a positive effect on the quality of life for both the injured members and their families.

Prior to 2010, the State of Iowa lacked the infrastructure to support a development of a sustainable statewide sports and recreation program for the physically disabled. The Iowa Sports Foundation or the ISF recognized this need. We had the leadership to make the difference within the State of Iowa and to serve as a catalyst for change.

Adaptive Sports Iowa or ASI is our answer to Iowa's need. Officially kicking off in March 2011, ASI was established with the mission of creating, organizing, and promoting sport and recreation programs for Iowa's physically disabled population.

The Adaptive Sports Iowa Summit, which Congressman Braley was just referring to, officially kicked off in March of 2011. As a part of the Summit, we were honored to host Charlie Hubener, Chief of U.S. Paralympics. Mr. Hubener came to observe and present ASI with an Olympic Opportunity Grant from the U.S. Paralympics and the Department of Veterans Affairs. That grant allowed for us to purchase new equipment and to begin a program that would target physically disabled veterans in the State of Iowa.

With the promise of that grant money, we launched Operation ASI, a program specifically intended for Iowa's physically disabled veterans.

To assist in the planning, we formed a committee to oversee it. The Committee was comprised of representatives from the Iowa National Guard, the Central Iowa VA Health Care System, Paralyzed Veterans of America-Iowa Chapter, and myself.

We held our first event on July 9, 2011, which was set up as an expo to introduce veterans to a variety of different activities.

The partnership between the U.S. Paralympics and the VA is an important and successful collaboration with great potential. Nationally, there are organizations that provide adaptive sports and recreation programming in their respective communities and regions. The overwhelming majority of these organizations work independently from each other with limited collaboration.

U.S. Paralympics is in the unique position to provide the leadership to these organizations to assist in the development of a nationwide grass roots support system.

There is an area of improvement I suggest the Subcommittee examine to improve this partnership.

Efficiently disseminate information regarding our programs to disabled veterans has been a significant stumbling block for our organization. When a disabled soldier returns home from rehab, there is currently no effective way for us to inform them of our programming opportunities. And an easy and immediate improvement to this partnership is to establish a way for soldiers that would benefit from our services to be informed prior to their separation from the military.

In closing, I would like to thank the Committee for your support of adaptive sports programming for disabled veterans.

I grew up in a household with a blind father. While he was not a veteran, I saw firsthand how opportunities like the ones that we are providing can drastically change lives. What you are doing matters a great deal and will have a positive impact for program participants, their families, friends, and communities for a long time to come.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Boone appears on p. 42.]

Mr. STUTZMAN. Thank you.

Ms. Acosta, you are recognized for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF TINA ACOSTA, MS, TR

Ms. ACOSTA. Chairman Stutzman, Ranking Member, Braley, and Members of Subcommittee, I would like to thank you for inviting me to come here and speak. It is an honor to be here to represent Turnstone and Ft. Wayne.

I would like to say that Turnstone has been a Paralympic sport club since 2009, and through our partnership it has provided a lot of resources, referrals, and experts, and it has really helped us to increase the quality and the size of our program.

In 1995, Turnstone addressed the lack of sports, recreation, and wellness activities by developing the region's only adaptive sports program. In 16 years, Turnstone's program has grown to become a Paralympic sport club, which today serves over 500 people with physical disabilities, but hundreds more, including our veterans and members of the Armed Forces, could be served if programs were available.

Turnstone has been providing services to the community since 1943, and last year we provided services to over 2,200 people. We provide a full range of services from birth through a person's lifetime, including licensed daycare, physical occupational and speech therapy, adult day services, a wellness center, and our adaptive sports program.

While we have served many people with physical disabilities, it became aware to us that we were not serving our veteran population.

While at a conference with the Paralympics Sports Association in April, I became aware of a program that was piloted in Chicago, it was called Healthy Minds, Healthy Bodies. The gal that presented the session talked about a veteran who had been suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and had literally lived his life in his basement for 5 years, and she credited the success of this program for helping to bring this gentleman back to life. And I felt like that that was a perfect program for us to apply for one of these Olympic opportunity grants.

We have a perfect set up here in Ft. Wayne. We have an accessible fitness and wellness center, we have trained staff that with work with veterans with physical disabilities.

The components of our program include inviting 25 veterans with physical disabilities and one family member to a free membership to our fitness center. It would also include monthly social events for any veteran with a physical disability, and at that time we would provide a speaker on health and wellness topics, we would introduce them to our adaptive sports program, and provide a meal, as well as networking and fellowship among the veterans.

Part of the grant also includes hiring a vet, contracting with a veteran who can help us get out there and be a liaison between the veterans and our organization.

We will also establish an advisory committee, and that advisory committee will evaluate the success of our program, but also the needs of our veterans and how we can partner with other community agencies to meet their needs.

I would like to talk a little bit about this gentleman, his name is Tim, and before we even applied for the grant he came to our facility, and I feel like he is a great example of how we can serve others.

Shortly after I returned in April, there was an article in the paper, this gentleman, Tim, he is 25 years old, he attends the Indiana University (IU) Purdue extension campus in Ft. Wayne and he did a project called Operation Thank You.

From there we offered him a free membership to our fitness center. He attended all summer, he came three times a week, and he started to see a lot of weight coming off. He told us that while he was rehabbing and after he went back to civilian life, there was just a real loss of activity and he had a huge weight gain. So he started coming. He has also been joining the fitness center at the campus and he has also been able to compete in some athletic events.

Just last month he participated in a 4 mile run where 9,500 people from the area competed in a 13 or a 6-K or a 4 mile run.

This is Tyler who he helped get through the race. Tim has been a great role model. He always has a positive attitude and he really wants to give back to the community for everything that has been given to him this summer.

This is another picture of him, this was taken in Chicago at the Valor Midwest Games. This was an opportunity for Tim to participate with 150 other veterans with disabilities in a variety of sports track and field events. It was a great opportunity for this young man to see the kinds of opportunities that there are out there for him in the world of sports and recreation.

And this is Tim today. He still continues to attend school. He is also a member of our adult wheelchair basketball team. He has a lot of goals he wants to accomplish. He has also been selected as a committee person to serve on the campus committee to explore the possibility of intramural and collegiate adaptive sports at the college level.

And I would just like to say that I would echo with what has been said today that we would like to open those doors between the VA and the community partnerships so that we can work together so that when these veterans are returning to the community, that the opportunities that they deserve are there for them.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Acosta appears on p. 45.]

Mr. STUTZMAN. Thank you. And if I remember right, yesterday you said that Tim was living at his parent's house for how long?

Ms. ACOSTA. I am sorry, what was the question?

Mr. STUTZMAN. Tim was living at his parent's house, is that right, in the basement?

Ms. ACOSTA. No, that was the gentleman in Chicago. Tim is living on campus at the University.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Okay, all right, I was confusing the two. All right, thank you.

Mr. Bauer, you are recognized for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF KIRK M. BAUER, J.D., USA (RET.)

Mr. BAUER. Thank you. My name is Kirk Bauer, I am a Director at Disabled Sports USA. The organization was started in 1967 by disabled Vietnam veterans. I got involved in 1969 when I got hit by a grenade during an ambush in Vietnam, and so I have been involved with this sports program for over 41 years, and I want to say that the Paralympics sport program in partnership with the VA is the most successful program we have ever seen and we are certainly honored to be part of it. We think it has opened up oppor-

tunities for veterans both at the recreational level, healthy lifestyles, as well as at the Paralympic level.

I think it is significant to note that the very first medal won at the Vancouver Paralympics in 2010 was also the very first medal ever won by the U.S. in Paralympic sport of biathlon, and it was won by a wounded warrior, Andy Soule, and I think that is a testament to the success of the Paralympic program and the work that they are doing and that we are trying to help them do to show that these veterans can excel in sport as well as excel in life.

So I certainly want to thank all of you for this opportunity and for the program that has been created.

I also want to touch on a few comments that were made by Congressman Braley. Even though this program is both to enhance lifestyles and to create physical activities so the disabled veterans can lead healthier lives, it also has a competition component, and we see that competition component not just for Paralympic sport, these young men and women are very competitive, and if one other veteran does something like jump a mogul or hit a wake on a wake board the next veteran says, okay, I have to do that now, and this natural competition really does speed up the progress that they make in sports and in rehab. And so that element of competition exists everywhere across the board and it is really very, very healthy, so thank you for your comments.

And I would also like to say that you touched on, you know, the recognition of rec therapy and what it really means. It means, you know, climbing mountains.

I was privileged to take two double leg amputees last year up Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa, and the three of us had literally one good leg between us, that was mine, thank God it was mine, and we made it to the top, and that is because of opportunities that were provided through programs like the VA, so thank you very much.

I am going to touch, just sort of briefly go over our testimony, but again, I want to make one recommendation which is to raise the awareness level with the rec departments in the various VAs. Right now, we are working with about 30 VAs that are very proactive, but just last week, we ran into a situation on the west coast where we talked to a VA rec person whose comment was, well, we have to treat all nonprofits equally. We can't, you know, give favor to one nonprofit over another when we are promoting programs. And I had to remind this person that Disabled Sports USA, along with Paralyzed Veterans of America, Disabled American Veterans who play sports is actually named in the legislation and is a partner with the VA and this is a VA program, and that person evidently was not aware of that.

So this kind of awareness really needs to get there so our job is easier in reaching out to the disabled veterans and providing the services that we know they deserve.

This program, the Paralympic sport program, has enabled Disabled Sports USA. We have been providing sports programs at the hospitals since 2003, when they declared the war in Iraq, but we have been able to double our service when the program was established through the VA.

This year we just got a count of over 1,100 severely wounded being served this year in over 125 different sports teaching events in 32 States involving 20 different sports.

So these are not just Paralympic sports, they are all sports that they can get involved in year round.

And we are now working with 30 VAs, recruiting disabled veterans for the programs, and 17 wounded warrior units like Fort Belvoir, Fort Campbell in Tennessee, and others around the country, the Pendleton and Lejeune Marine Warrior Transition Units. And all of this has been possible because of this funding, and so we do want to stress how important it has been in our outreach and service to the disabled veterans and the wounded warriors.

We have been able to leverage this money to raise \$3 in private-sector funding for every dollar that has been provided through the Paralympics, and that has enabled us to expand services beyond what the role is within the Paralympic sport program.

We now have sponsored four elite international competitions here in the U.S. having to do with ski racing. That has been funded by private-sector funding, but it is also a supplement to the competition program so that they can become better and better prepared to be Paralympians in the 2014 Paralympic Games.

We have been able to fund training camps. We have been able to hold activities in is summertime. A range of activities in is summertime both on the competitive level as well as the recreational level.

We have been able to support a national hand cycling series that involves disabled veterans that cannot walk but are able to hand cycle so they have those opportunities, and all of this again has been parlayed, it has been leveraged so that we can work more effectively with these young men and women.

And this program has created such excitement that Disabled Sports USA has 104 chapters, 39 of them have already become Paralympic sport clubs helping to promote the brand, helping to promote the message, and we expect many more chapters to come on board as a result of this program.

So this is involving communities across the country.

And the next step that has occurred because of this program is that, you know, not only teaching events are held, but also ongoing events so that the veteran can be involved on a continuous basis. We have continuous programs going on in California, in Washington, in New Hampshire, in Vermont, in Virginia, in Maryland, in Colorado, and other places, and this is giving them ongoing opportunities to lead healthy and fit lives.

I have some examples again of some of the veterans that have benefitted from the program. One is a policeman now in Pleasanton, skis regularly, hand cycles regularly, and again is back at work.

Another gentleman was a demolition expert, he literally was blown up in Iraq. If you saw the movie Hurt Locker he was the hurt locker, and the blast was so severe, it wasn't the heat from the blast but the actual power of the blast that literally ripped off the skin from his legs and he had to have multiple skin grafts. He just last month got a job offer from one of our corporate sponsors, AON, to work in their security department, and again, he was so

excited about that opportunity, but this is again a full round of getting back into life and getting back into work.

Another is working for Boeing and is also a certified ski instructor, teaching other disabled veterans how to ski, and you know, using that sport as a form of rehabilitation.

I think the list could go on. We had one wife write to us and say thank you for giving me my husband back. She said he had been depressed, he had lost the light in his eyes, and when we got involved in the sports program, he suddenly came alive again. And so this is literally changing lives and changing the lives of families as well.

So these are just some of the examples of what has happened with this program. We envision greater things as the program continues.

I do want to stress that the need is greater than ever. We have been seeing at the hospitals, particularly at Bethesda, an influx. I have never, in my 41 years, have never seen so many multiple limb amputees ever. Single, double, triple amputees, there is actually a couple of quadruple amputees now, and I tried to get a meeting with Chuck Scovill, Colonel Scovill, the head of amputee care at Bethesda on Friday and his aid said forget it, he is in an all day meeting.

Three weeks after Bethesda reopened their beds are totally full, and this is after they have shifted a third of the patients from Walter Reed over to Belvoir, which has a great facility by the way, and they don't know what to do with the influx of multiple amputees that are coming through. They are full right now and this was not anticipated.

So we expect that this need and these young men and women will need these support services in the future and we ask for your continued support on their behalf.

So thank you very much for the opportunity to testify, and thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Bauer appears on p. 48.]

Mr. STUTZMAN. Thank you. And you know amazing stories and I am sure you could share a lot of them, and the mental toughness that they have is also unbelievable.

Mr. BAUER. I am sorry.

Mr. STUTZMAN. The mental toughness that these men and women as they start training and performing is incredible.

Mr. BAUER. Yes, absolutely.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Mr. Blake, you are recognized for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF CARL BLAKE

Mr. BLAKE. Chairman Stutzman, Ranking Member Braley, Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of Paralyzed Veterans of America, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the partnership between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the United States Olympic Committee Paralympics.

Perhaps no veterans service organization (VSO) understands the importance of sports as a rehabilitation tool more than PVA. Since its inception in 1946, PVA has recognized the important role that sports and recreation play in the spinal cord injury rehabilitation process. It is for this reason that PVA developed and annually ad-

ministers a comprehensive sports and recreation program for its members and all veterans with disabilities.

PVA was pleased to support the provisions of Public Law 110–389. PVA has been fortunate to benefit directly from the expansion of activities under the USOC–Paralympics partnership with VA.

PVA was a grant recipient of one of the first round of grants provided by the USOC. In December 2010, PVA received a grant of \$400,000 from the USOC for the Paralympics Integrated Adaptive Sports Program. This funding was intended to cover program support activities through June 2011 when the next round of grants was originally anticipated to be disbursed.

With the financial support of the Paralympics, PVA was able to provide sports and recreation opportunities to 805 unique disabled veterans. Ultimately, 4,261 participation opportunities were made available to disabled veterans. These are individual events for individual unique veterans.

PVA allocated the grant funding to the PVA Hand cycling Program, the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, our National Trapshoot Circuit, and a PVA/American Wheelchair Bowling Association (AWBA) Bowling Tournament series.

We believe that much progress and enhanced cooperation has resulted from the Paralympics program and its partnership with VA.

Under this program, PVA has witnessed improved coordination between our organization, the USOC–Paralympics, and other veterans' and community-based organizations that has enhanced existing programs and advanced development of new programs in communities that previously had not been served.

In the past, we offered several recommendations that we believed would expand veteran participation in programs administered by the VA and the Paralympics program. While we believe that the Paralympics program has helped alleviate some of those concerns, our principal recommendation to remove barriers to participation remains the same.

Our concern is that newly injured veterans should be provided timely access to education and training regarding sports and recreation opportunities, much like that was already mentioned here. We believe that the VA and DoD should continue to improve coordination of outreach efforts between legitimate organizations promoting sports and recreation opportunities and newly injured veterans.

With regard to the USOC–Paralympics program specifically, we are pleased to see that the USOC has recently provided an open accounting of how it has administered all of its funds; however, we believe the USOC–Paralympics should implement a review committee that consists of leaders from the adapted sports and recreation community who administer programs for disabled veterans to also participate in the disbursement of funding for these programs.

Finally, we have some concern about the timeliness and efficiency of funding the USOC–Paralympics program.

In order for the organization to disburse funding to grant recipients, the USOC–Paralympics program must receive Federal funding in a timely manner. We understand that VA has been slow to provide the necessary funding authorized by the original legislation. The ability of the USOC–Paralympics to plan and administer

the grants it provides is hindered by the inability of Congress to complete work on the appropriations process.

As we understand it, funding for this grant program is directed through the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs. In other words, until the Fiscal Year 2012 VA Appropriations Bill is finally completed, funding for this program will be placed on hold.

Moreover, we must emphasize that the importance of this program should preclude it from having its funding reduced as a part of deficit reduction discussions.

We look forward to working with this Subcommittee to ensure that a wide range of sports and recreation activities are available to the men and women who have served and sacrificed.

This concludes my statement, I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Blake appears on p. 52.]

Mr. STUTZMAN. Thank you very much, and thank you to all of you on the panel, and would also just mention right now I want to recognize Mr. Bauer and also Colonel Cardillo for your service to our country and thank you for your willingness to serve.

I will start with just anyone on the panel. Just a simple question. Do you have any suggestions on how to improve the Paralympic grant process? And anybody can feel free to answer that.

Mr. BAUER. Well, again we would reiterate the need for timeliness. I know that sometimes their funding is held up because of, you know, either bureaucracies or the uncertainty of the funding from the Committee.

But the timeliness. We are already, for instance, moving forward for winter programs. We have to schedule these programs months and advance. Our first program will be in December, December 4th through the 11th, in Colorado. It will be a full week of everything to do with winter sports. There is going to be sled hockey training, there is going to be Nordic biathlon, snow boarding, alpine skiing. There is going to be race training, and all that had to be put into place and yet we are still uncertain about the funding because of the process.

So I would certainly reiterate what Blake said that, you know, we just need some certainty so we can move forward.

Mr. BLAKE. I would like to say as a credit to the Paralympics, they have already begun outlining their plan for disbursing funding through various grants. Unfortunately, they are just held up by not having the actual money in hand to divvy it up once it comes on-line.

Mr. BAUER. And I will support that statement very much.

Mr. BOONE. The organizations that are here in front of you today obviously other than myself, they are large national organizations. More often than not, though the people that are out there doing the actual work, the local adaptive sports programs, a lot of times, they are independent organizations, and unfortunate to be hooked up to a larger nonprofit. The Iowa sports Foundation, a lot of times, they are independently operated. And one thing we recognize is just the nature of the beast is adaptive sports usually the numbers are low and the cost is very high for the programming for equipment and everything else.

So when grant money is committed, it is a big financial burden for these small organizations to commit the funds and do the programs not knowing when exactly the money is going to arrive.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Okay. And then kind of to follow up with you, Mr. Boone and Ms. Acosta, if you would chip in on this one as well. How did you initially find out about the VA Paralympic adaptive program sports—the sports grant program and what was your impressions of the program and the process?

Ms. ACOSTA. I found out about the program at the Paralympic Leadership Conference in April, and we were very excited because we have a 3.8 million annual operating budget and 60 percent of that is raised locally and we felt like this would be a great resource for us to utilize to get our veterans involved, so we were very excited about it and hearing about it.

There was a time delay in getting the application to us, and like everyone has said, you know, we are now kind of—we are going to be running forward very quickly to do what we need to be within the next year.

Mr. BOONE. Adaptive Sports Iowa found out through Paralympics. I was looking up to really create a good relationship between me and Charlie Huebner just because he was so interested with the success that our program was having locally, very quickly and we were made aware of it.

And what was the second part of that question?

Mr. STUTZMAN. Just how did you find out about the program.

Mr. BOONE. Okay, yeah. It was through USA Paralympics and the conversations I had with Charlie Huebner.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Okay. And then again to all the panel and feel free to anyone to answer this, but how would you track successes of the grant program and the grant that you had received measuring success how?

Mr. BAUER. Again, Kirk Bauer, Disabled Sports USA. We are actually conducting surveys. This last summer we have a return of about 100 surveys and we are shooting for about 300 to 400 surveys returned, and getting paperwork from these guys and gals is not always the easiest thing in the world. And basically, we are tracking their assessment on their outlook on life, as well as their fitness levels, as well as their continuing activity.

That is really the crux of this whole program is you want to introduce them and teach them skills, but then you want to see that they continue to use those skills to lead a healthy lifestyle.

So we are actually in the process of doing those surveys now and they are very positive so far. The preliminary results are very, very, very positive.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Good.

Colonel CARDILLO. We all have metrics that we use towards determining a program's success, but the reality of the issue is if you get one soldier or one veteran to come to a program that has never been prior to his injury, that is success. And if it is only one person, then the next time it is two, and then the next time it is three.

And I think that is where we have seen the growth in our programming effort. The fact that somebody will show up, realize hey, I can do this and then go back home, share that information with

other veterans, other friends, and the next time we promote something we get more applications.

And so, it is truly by them coming, participating, and recognizing that I can do this and I don't want to sit at home anymore, I want to get out and I want to be active.

Mr. STUTZMAN. So do you find if they show up one time, they usually show up again?

Colonel CARDILLO. Yes, to be honest with you. And it is both fortunate and unfortunate. It is fortunate because they are excited about what they are doing, but we only have so many slots, if you will, at these programs, and we really want to expand the programming to allow other veterans that haven't had the opportunity to come to these programs.

So yes, we have had repeat veterans come. But I have also had to tell guys hey look, I am going to put you on my wait list because I want to bring other guys in to expose them and give them that same opportunity to experience success.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Okay.

Ms. ACOSTA. I think for the success for our program would be measured by obviously their attendance to the program. You know, we are looking at people coming into a fitness center, and we will be doing interviews with them, pre and post surveys. But I think another measurement of success would be the number of contacts we make in the community, the resources that can lead those veterans to our organization, which we feel we are lacking right now.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Okay.

Mr. BAUER. I want to add. Again, I want to stress the fact that once, you know, we are about teaching skills, and once the skill is learned whether a person learns how to kayak or bicycle or ski or rock climb or scuba dive, once that skill is learned, that wounded warrior, that disabled veteran can do that activity anywhere, and that is again why we are asking in the surveys are they continuing the activity. It doesn't necessarily need a structured program once they learn the skills. If they want to get into competition that is a different matter. They need the training, they need the coaches, what have you, and so you are providing opportunities for us to teach skills so that they can use those skills any place in the country.

Mr. BLAKE. I would just sort of piggyback back on what Colonel Cardillo said, I think quantifying success for something like this is very difficult.

I mean, I think up front we measure success by the number of new unique veterans that we serve and the number of new opportunities that are created. But much like Colonel Cardillo's point about serving a single new veteran, you only have to go to the Wheelchair Games once, and to meet someone who has never been and participated in their first wheelchair games and just the joy and their attitude and how it changes is enough to convince you that that is success.

You know, the interesting thing about this is success is beyond just becoming an athlete or becoming involved in recreational activities again, this translates into other things in life. Confidence becomes the opportunity to maybe go find a job when I might not have otherwise considered it because I have a serious disability. It

is getting employed, it is becoming an active member of my community again.

So quantifying it is certainly a difficult proposition, but if we serve one veteran with a new opportunity that is success to us. Granted one is not enough.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Sure.

Colonel CARDILLO. If you don't mind, I think now is probably an appropriate time to read that exhibit that I referenced earlier from a veteran who attended one of our programs for the first time. He is totally blind. His injury was to a gunshot wound after he left the service. Still a veteran, still visually impaired, and he came to our most recent winter program. And I think this letter would describe what success is in a number of different ways.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Okay, Mr. Walz, do you have any objection to him going ahead and doing that now? Okay. All right, go ahead.

Colonel CARDILLO. This gentleman, his name is Lonnie Bedwell, United States Navy from the State of Indiana and he attended our winter sport program back in March.

I want to start this letter by thanking everyone involved with putting this program together. As you will soon tell, I am not very good with words so please forgive me as it is truly heartfelt.

When I sit back and reflect on this past weekend, I am so humbled and grateful. I had the opportunity to meet a little 7 year-old visually impaired girl who is completely full of life. I am in awe of someone that never had the blessings in life to see as many years as I did.

I also met a man who sacrificed so much in combat and spent months in hospitals and has had 58 surgeries to piece him back together. Even after all of these surgeries, he is still not whole, not to mention all of the others I was so fortunate to meet.

You can never walk in another man's shoes, but you can gain knowledge as well as draw strength and inspiration from their life's experience.

Whether you realize it or not, you have made a major impact on so many lives, and here are a few things you have done for those of us who have had the opportunity to participate in this program.

We have developed new friendships that in some cases, I am sure will last for years.

Walls that were solid, you not only placed a door in them, you also opened it for us.

You have provided us with a new sense of hope and drive.

Thoughts like the following once again go through my mind. I really can do this. I wonder how much better at this I can get? And just what else I really can do. In my mind, aren't these wonderful thoughts.

With regards to my family, here are some of the things you have done for them. You place tears of joy in my mother's eyes. My father told me I am proud of you, son, and at the age of 45 this almost brings tears to my eyes.

As for the rest of my family, it also provides them with joy and a new sense of strength.

In my community, you have put me on a platform to help others as you have helped me. What a humbling honor this is.

In just a few short weeks of people finding out I was heading to Colorado and 2 days of being back, the following has happened. Almost a countless number of people have called my house or approached me to talk. A mother came up to me crying and thanking me. She said, you don't know how much of a difference you make in my daughter's life as she watches and listens to you. A couple said, you make us realize how little we have to complain about. And a gentleman talked with me for 30 minutes about the whole event in a local restaurant. That I know of, I had never spoken to any of these people before, and this doesn't include the others I don't know and those that I do.

For those who put this program together, took care of us at the lodge, guided us on the slopes, and financially supported this, I want to thank you once again.

So you see you have not only touched the lives of those of us privileged enough to participate in this event, you have touched the lives of literally hundreds of others. I just hope that I can represent all of your efforts and support in a manner that will also make your proud.

Signed Lonnie Bedwell, United States Navy. Thank you.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Thank you. Yeah, thank you for sharing that.

I recognize Congressman Braley for his questions.

Mr. BRALEY. Well, Colonel Cardillo, I don't know how you could listen to that letter and not be moved by it. I also want to make sure that, I know this was just an oversight, we want to thank you, Mr. Blake, for your service and sacrifice to our country, but I think that letter you just read really captures what these programs are all about.

And Mr. Blake, you made a very important point, and that is how you measure the success of these programs often ignores some of the real realities of success.

We know that one of the biggest drivers of health care costs in the country are chronic disease treatments and we know that we pay an enormous amount for chronic disease care that is directly related to obesity and all of its attended physical and mental problems.

So when you provide a disabled person the opportunity to be physically active and involved and engaged and give them the resources to be active, we are saving ourselves millions and billions of dollars of future long-term health care costs.

So that is why when you look at these programs and the small investments we are making in them, I think it is important for us to think long term about the net impact on U.S. taxpayers by failing to make these important investments.

I have had the privilege of working with a lot of disabled people in my life and addressing their needs, and Mr. Bauer, your statement about the number of multiple amputees that we are seeing in our districts, and your comment, Colonel Cardillo, about how this impacts their lives and what it means to the people they come into contact with, all of us see these wounded warriors missing limbs in the United States Capitol as we go into vote brought there by one of the Capitol tour guides to give them a sense of the government that should be standing behind them.

And I think all of us have had that experience knowing how contentious things are in this town of wondering why we ever complain about the minute things in our lives that give us problems.

So one of the best things that ever happened to me, Mr. Bauer, was my good friend in Waterloo, Iowa, Dennis Clark, who has a prosthetics and orthotics company and provided me with an orthotic device when I tore my Achilles tendon, started the prosthetic rehab unit here at Walter Reed, and for 2 years, flew back and forth on his own dime to turn it into a world-class rehab facility.

And Dennis took me through there and we got to see some of the people who benefit from this program in the beginning and end stages of their rehab. And if you can't be inspired by those wounded warriors and what they go through, I don't think you have any feelings.

Dennis told me the story of one of the first people they took care of who was an amputee who was a very competitive skier and wanted to get back on the slopes and they fitted him with a special device on his stubbies so he could go out on that slope at Walter Reed and try it out.

And he said they were there and he kept pushing this veteran to get him started down the hill and he kept falling down and falling down and falling down. And he looked up and there were people on the walkway pounding on the windows thinking he was abusing this wounded warrior, and it was the drive and the competitive nature inside of that young man that kept dragging him back up that hill until he was able to use those skis. And that is why these programs are so important.

So one of the things that kept coming up in your testimony, Mr. Bauer, was this whole idea of creating awareness. Awareness of the programs and making sure not just that the wounded warriors who participate, but the broader public knows they exist and how they benefit all of us, not just those competing.

So I would like to hear from those of you on the panel what we can be doing to address that issue.

Mr. BAUER. That is a tough question, I would probably rather have somebody else answer it, but let me tell you what we are trying to do, okay, as a starter.

When we work with a local community group, a Disabled Sports USA chapter we have agreements with, 63 of them now that are helping us with this program, they agree to promote the program, promote, you know, the benefits of physical activity and promote the Paralympics so that their communities in States across the country hear about the programs.

We help them to do media releases about the activities they are doing to get local media coverage, interviews with wounded warriors that get the message across in their own communities, and that is what we are trying to do at the local level so that people can hear more and more about the programs.

We also are conducting, you know, sort of larger events that help to promote the abilities of the wounded warriors.

One example was just in Portland, Oregon. The Hood to Coast Race is 197-mile relay race from the top of Mt. Hood to the coast of Oregon and there are 1,200 teams of 12-person teams so there

is 14000, 15,000 doing this. We had the only wounded warrior team in that 12-person team of traumatic brain injury (TBI), amputee, visual impairment and we got a lot of media attention about that, again promoting their abilities, but promoting the fact that they can do these things, and those are the things we are trying to do.

It is a tough nut to crack, promoting the Paralympics. I know that the U.S. Olympic Committee has tried diligently to get the message out and they do it all the time, but getting through all the media clutter is sometimes very difficult and we are going to have to just keep on working at that.

If I could just give one more little story to substantiate what you just said. I was up with a group of wounded warriors doing a 100-mile bicycle ride and one of them had gotten up with me at 4:30 in the morning to try to finish the whole ride in one day with a hand cycle, and it is over three mountain passes. He made it over two of them and he didn't make it over the last one, he just didn't have anything left in him, and this is his first time trying.

Now you would have thought he was discouraged, but he was excited, and he said, you know what, I am coming back next year and I am going to beat that last hill.

And that is the kind of attitude we love to see, that is what these sports programs do. They ignite these guys and motivate them to be better next time. And we just think it is a wonderful program.

Mr. BRALEY. Mr. Boone, you had also raised this in your testimony so there is no effective way to inform them prior to separation, this is one of the common concerns we have when people are being separated from service and especially with the extensive reliance on our National Guard and Reserve units. They are getting bombarded with information when they are being sent back home and a lot of times they just want to get home, be back with their families, and it is later on in the process when they are thinking about their rehabilitation or what is available that they need that information and it is often not available to them.

So what has been your experience in dealing with that?

Mr. BOONE. Well, as you know, Iowa is a very—it is kind of a unique environment in that there is no major military installations, there is no major military hospitals other than the VA Central Iowa Health Care System and the Iowa National Guard.

So, the struggle that we have had is trying to find, I guess, newly disabled veterans. The average age I would say of the disabled veteran population in Iowa is probably 70-plus years old. So, really trying to find that group that would really benefit most, you know, from the programs that we are offering has been difficult. And I don't know if I can give you a good example of a success that we have had in that department just because it is extremely difficult to get our word out.

And on top, is the fact that because we are such a new program too, you know, there is no real way for us to really get to them.

You know, what I am suggesting is there should be some way, and this can be applied across the country. But there should be some way for veterans that are about to be released, I mean just a single piece of paper saying what adaptive sports programs there are, where are they at, and how you contact them and that you don't need to do anything beyond that. Because right now for us

to find out who is being released, who is coming home, it is just that that information is just not available.

Mr. BRALEY. Colonel.

Colonel CARDILLO. This touches at my first recommendation that I offered up and that is the identification and sharing of information about who these athletes or who these veterans are.

I am a little bit familiar with Health Insurance Portability and Accounting Act (HIPAA) but I am not a subject matter expert. When I first started working with the U.S. Association of Blind Athletes I said to myself, well, where are they, who are they, you know, what is our target audience?

And so I have learned some things. Perhaps the biggest way to get at this is through what is called a business associate relationship between the VA and selected organizations, certainly not everybody. Maybe it could be written for everybody, I don't know, that allows the sharing of information of a name and an address of somebody that has a physical disability or a visual impairment and let us help the VA or the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD). If we are still talking about active-duty servicemembers, give us that information and let us help you rehabilitate them.

Because right now it is word of mouth or finding needles in haystacks in locating these individuals.

Mr. BRALEY. Thank you.

Mr. BLAKE. I think from PVA's perspective we have sort of a unique opportunity that makes it easier for us to talk about these programs that are available because we have a captured population that comes through the spinal chord injury (SCI) service of the VA and we begin informing them about all their different opportunities while they are in the midst of rehab.

The National Veterans Wheelchair Games has also proven to be an important outreach opportunity because it is a national-level event that attracts veterans of all eras, including Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF) veterans, and then I mentioned in my testimony the number of new participants as well, and once they find out about these opportunities they just sort of move on their own.

I think the real challenge in this is not unlike we have talked about in health care and all these other issues with the VA in particular in getting the word out to individuals who are not necessarily coming through a facility like Walter Reed or Brooke or other major military treatment facilities or VA facilities around the country. You know, you end up with disabled servicemembers at their home posts that might not ever find out about these programs and so they are still challenged there.

You know, we have talked about for years the problems with transition assistance for the disabled in particular and this is an opportunity that falls by the wayside along with the many other things that go on with the disabled transition assistance.

So your concern is not lost, and it is a matter of getting the VA and DoD and all of the partners that are here engaged together to get the word out.

Mr. BAUER. Thank you.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Okay, Mr. Walz.

Mr. WALZ. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member. I want to thank you both for your passion on this for bringing this hearing together, and I say every year that we gather to talk about this program. I can't help but leave much more optimistic, much more encouraged to where things are at.

I want to thank all of our panelists and everyone here for the incredible work you do. I think it has been hit on, the multiple returns not just to the warriors who earned every bit of our support, but the return to our society that this does and a sense of what we can accomplish together. It has such a strong appeal, a public/private partnership doing all the right things, the success stories.

I am truly impressed with my colleagues asking, and the answers you gave, about measuring effectiveness with symmetric, and I think we know there are intangibles here that are going to be very difficult to measure. But reading the letter or seeing the face of some of our athletes is enough and those around it that it inspires us.

So my only regret today is that our fellow Americans couldn't see how this was done. They see a Congress working together with the private sector for all the right reasons with effective outcomes. That is a very encouraging thing and I think we could use more of it.

So I can't tell you how supportive I have been and how impressed I have been from everyone involved from the Paralympic Committee, and we are going to hear from them, and VA to all of you.

I was just going to end, and I think maybe you got on a little bit Carl, at the end, I was going to ask the line of questioning that went there, always comes back to ways we can get efficiencies between DoD, VA, and the private sector.

Are we introducing sports and rehabilitative services? Because I am looking at this as we are talking rehabilitation in general to folks who may not be able to go one and do a century ride or something but who may gain through the Vision Centers of Excellence, the ability to ride with their children through the park, whatever that may be. Are we introducing these things early enough? And I think maybe you hit on it, Carl, that there is the problem that it is hit or miss. You are in a little better position because of that, maybe Blinded Veterans of America is in a little better position with Tom and his people. But what do you think, are we getting to everybody who might benefit? And not just current veterans. I think there are some from previous conflicts that could certainly benefit.

Mr. BLAKE. I think the short answer to that question is probably no.

From our perspective, like I said, we introduce our programs very early on when we have new members. Most new injuries that would be members of our organizations are brought into the spinal cord injury service at the VA and we have that unique opportunity where we are plugged in and can make them aware of all of their opportunities almost from the get go.

We found that not related to sports activities, but when it comes to employment with our vocational rehabilitation program, much the same principal applies. We begin informing them about their opportunities very early in the rehabilitation process because it

helps establish their goals in a lighter spectrum going forward. But that is a unique perspective because of the SCI service.

I think when you look out on a broader scale I would say that you can never introduce this type of opportunity early enough, and I would suggest it is probably not early enough, particularly when you look at even from something like the Wheelchair Games. We get a lot of new participants every year and the shocking part of that is the number of new participants that are Vietnam-era veterans who are, you know, 40-plus years removed from service just finding out about this kind of stuff, and it makes you wonder why didn't they know about this a long time ago and why not about these other programs that are out there?

Mr. WALZ. And Mr. Bauer, I mean the reason I ask it is we are starting to kind of—we are working on some stuff to redefine rehabilitation not just to a functional level and let them go, but to continue to go on. We are in the process of doing that right now.

I am interested how this would go into that general rehabilitation and quality of life increase.

Mr. BAUER. And I would like to offer a little slightly nuance answer to your question about reaching them.

In looking at it at three or four different levels. First of all you have the main hospitals, Walter Reed Bethesda now, Brooke Army Medical Center, in San Antonio, National Naval Medical Center in San Diego. Those three major facilities are taking a lot of the severely wounded, okay, not those who have slightly less wounds, they are being covered by facilities like Fort Belvoir and other facilities. Those three facilities are very attune to recreation and sports. Paralympics is there all the time, Disabled Sports USA is there all the time, and they are getting introduced at the earliest possible stage to sports and recreation activities as part of their rehab. It is a very effective tool. The therapists love it because they can say to somebody, you know, if you want to go on this hiking trip or you want to get certified in scuba, you have to go through the therapy in order to be cleared for this. So it really, you know, motivates them to do the therapy.

We have a golf program. We set up a thing, if you go to all 8 weeks of the learning sessions you get a free set of Ping clubs. Well, I tell you attendance doubled, you know, after that announcement was made. So that is why the therapists love it.

At certain VA hospitals they are very proactive. We are working with 30, I would say a good portion of them are proactive. But you know, there are 170 something facilities in the VA system, so we think that there could be more proactivity in that end of things and that is where things are falling through. Where are your transition units?

Paralympics is working with these guys all the time, so are we. Those units, some of them again are very proactive. The Camp Lejeune Marine Wounded Warrior Barracks, they started years ago with sports. We were down there back in 2004. Pendleton same thing. But then some others are not quite as proactive about physical activity, and that is where it is more difficult to identify and get them on board in terms of, you know, recruiting warriors from that.

But I will say at the military medical centers that I mention, they are very proactive about recreation.

Mr. WALZ. Okay. Colonel.

Colonel CARDILLO. I have a unique situation, or our association has a unique opportunity, to help influence the rehabilitation of those servicemembers right up front, and that is through our relationship with the VA Blind Rehabilitation Centers (BRC)s.

We are actually funded to help go to those centers and see what we can do as an organization to enhance their rehabilitation programs through sports or physical activity and recreation. When we started, we were only working with three or four of the Blind Rehabilitative Centers, and then over the last 2 years we have expanded that to 9 of the existing 13. They just fielded three hospitals the past couple of months and I haven't been to those yet.

But what we try and do is we will go in there and take a look at their programs through sports and physical activity and see what they would like to do to enhance it or what we can do to help enhance that program.

Their clientele is average age 65, but the young guys go there because the active-duty health care system doesn't have a Blind Rehabilitation Center for visually impaired soldiers, so those guys get sent to the VA centers.

So if they come and there is a rehab program in place, then we think we have kind of opened that first door for them through sports and physical activity, and if they decide to take it to the next level or increase their physical skills, then we help them guide through those other wickets, if you will.

From the blind and visually impaired, I think we have a good relationship right now with the VA at the Blind Rehab Centers to help enhance their programming efforts.

Mr. WALZ. Well, I certainly appreciate all this.

I would ask you all just as a yes or no, I hate to put you on the spot like this. When I go back home and my constituents expect me to make decisions about spending or whatever, is this a good \$10 million spent?

Colonel CARDILLO. Yes.

Mr. BLAKE. Yes.

Mr. BAUER. Yes.

Mr. WALZ. Absolutely. We will carry that message home with us. Thank you.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Thank you very much, and I want to thank the panel, and especially to Mr. Boone and Ms. Acosta for traveling from Iowa and from Indiana respectively. And I apologize, Mr. Blake, for missing your service, thank you as well.

And I will excuse you all and thank you again, this has been very informative and appreciate all of you and what you are doing as well.

So at this time we will call up the second panel to come forward. Okay, welcome.

I want to introduce Mr. Charles Huebner from the U.S. Olympic Committee, thank you for being here. And also Mr. Christopher Nowak, from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Thank you to both of you and we will go ahead and take your testimony, Mr. Huebner, if you would like to again, I will recognize you.

STATEMENTS OF CHARLES HUEBNER, CHIEF OF U.S. PARALYMPICS, U.S. OLYMPIC COMMITTEE; AND CHRISTOPHER NOWAK, DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF NATIONAL VETERANS SPORTS PROGRAM AND SPECIAL EVENTS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

STATEMENT OF CHARLES HUEBNER

Mr. HUEBNER. Excellent, thank you so much. Good morning Chairman Stutzman, Ranking Member Braley, and Members of the Subcommittee. I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify on progress of the Department of Veteran Affairs, U.S. Olympic Committee, and U.S. Paralympics partnership.

On a personal note I have a veteran in the room, Lieutenant Heidi Grimm-Powell. It is her birthday, I would just like to say happy birthday to her.

By way of a brief background, the USOC is an organization chartered by Congress and one of only four National Olympic Committees that manage both the Olympic and Paralympic Program, and we are very proud of that.

We are also only one of only a handful of National Olympic Committees that are 100-percent privately funded. Most people don't know that. Our major competitors are out funding us often as much as five to one.

Paralympic programs are sports for physically disabled athletes. The Paralympic movement began shortly after World War II utilizing sport as a form of rehabilitation for injured military personnel returning from combat.

In 2012 the Paralympic Games returned to Great Britain where with significant involvement from U.S. and United Kingdom veterans, the movement was founded.

Injured military personnel and veterans are really the soul of the Paralympic movement. And when I speak of the Paralympic movement, I am not just talking about the few athletes that are elite that go to the games, but I am talking about the programming in the U.S. led by the USOC and our partners Paralyzed Veterans of America, Disabled Sports USA, USA Shooting, to name a few, that allow veterans with physical disabilities an opportunity to re-engage in life by simply skiing with their buddies or playing in the backyard with their kids.

As programming expands daily, we see a population that has lower secondary medical conditions, higher self-esteem, lower stress levels, and higher achievement levels in education and employment. Research proves that.

More importantly, we see a population that inspires all Americans to pursue excellence in sports and in life.

A few years ago, this Committee with incredible vision and leadership, Congressional leaders and veteran and military organizations asked the USOC to lead this effort. Due to our powerful and inspiring brand, our expertise in physical activity and sports for persons with disabilities and our significant infrastructure of mem-

ber organizations such as the National Recreation of Parks Association, YMCA, and USA Hockey, organizations that have a footprint in just about every U.S. community, which allows for incredible financial and programmatic efficiencies.

We accepted the responsibility and opportunity to serve those that have served us, and because of your leadership in developing and providing funding for this USOC and VA partnership, we are here today to report the following outcomes in the past year.

The VA and USOC have distributed more than 70 grants and provided ongoing training and technical assistance with an emphasis on engaging veterans at the community level in physical activity.

An interesting point about that and I think it goes to the efficiency that you talked about a little bit in the past panel, these grant organizations are contributing more than \$40 million in private resources and programmatic support of their own resources against this initiative. It is pretty incredible.

Each of those grant recipients has a contract with the USOC, has goals outlined in their contract with outcomes, so it is performance and outcome based, and they are auditable, so we are very, very, very pleased with the ability to make sure that the money is being spent in an impactful way.

More than 200 Paralympics sport clubs or community sport organizations are currently providing programs for veterans or service-members, so above the 70 grantees I just talked about, there are another 130 organizations based on the USOC, our partners in the VA, asking them to make veterans an initiative in their communities that have taken on this task with their own private resources.

More than 800 community sport military and veteran leaders have been provided training, technical assistance, and ongoing program support to develop or expand existing programs for veterans.

In the first panel, you heard the Turnstone Program talk about the Paralympic Leadership Conference, which is a joint initiative between the VA and the U.S. Olympic Committee where we are training people on how to go implement programming in their community to serve veterans.

More than 14,000 veterans with disabilities participated in programs and activities since the programs inception, and currently 85 veterans are receiving a benefit based on their ability to be an a national team or pursue the Paralympic Games.

Thanks to the leadership of this Committee, Secretary Shinseki, Executive Director Billicous, VA Director of National Veteran Sports and Events, Chris Nowak, and VA staff member, Matt Bristol, we have completed the planning phases for 2011 beyond with an emphasis on expanded services, greater efficiencies, and significant impact on those that we owe so much.

And I would just like to recognize the fact that all of those individuals I mentioned are veterans.

Moving forward, and this is based on the feedback of our constituents, many who were on the first panel as well as the VA, and I would argue that was probably the biggest challenge in our first year of this program is having that engaging planning process with VA leadership and VA staff.

Our goal is this, to provide \$7.5 million in grants, training, and programmatic support, and improve the grant process, which I believe we have already addressed in our planning over the last 6 months.

Post the quarterly reports and grant recipients online and make all of our information available and transparent to all the participants as well as the general public. It is currently posted on the USOC Web site.

Implement the inaugural VA–USOC Paralympic Adaptive Sport Training Conference with more than 50 VA therapeutic rec coordinators participating in February 2012 at the U.S. Olympic Training Center. That I believe, and that was a recommendation from Mr. Nowak, will assist us in expanding awareness and knowledge of the collaborative opportunities with VA therapeutic rec coordinators and opportunities available in their communities. A significant opportunity for us, and again, recommended by the VA.

Reducing the year one programmatic staff and reinvesting those resources in programming. Based on our assessments we can reduce our programmatic staff right now from 17 to 10 and a half people and be efficient and effective and utilize those resources to reinvest back in the programs.

And then the only challenge is pursuing additional resources. We see a great need for focused regional coordinators. An example of that is in Chicago where we have a full-time staff person working with a collaborative agency there. They are coordinating 25 different organizations to work together and focus on developing programs for veterans and we feel that is a great need that will allow greater impact.

In closing, I would just like to highlight one program that aligns all of our strategies, collaboration, training, technical assistance, awareness, and financial support, along with an emphasis on hiring veterans.

Joe Brown was from Arizona. His family has a strong military history. His grandfather died as a prisoner of war during the Korean War. His father was an Air Force fighter pilot. Joe played football at the Ohio State University, I won't hold that against him, and 3 years in the National Football League. But the Army Rangers were continually a calling, so he joined the Army, the Rangers and deployed to Iraq in 2004 and again in 2007.

During his 2007 tour, he was calling in air strikes atop a three-story building trying to help a unit in trouble. As his unit was leaving the building, Brown fell down a 30-foot shaft suffering a severe brain injury.

Brown knew the firsthand importance of physical activity in the rehabilitation process. He attended the USOC–VA Paralympic Leadership Conference to gain valuable training and expertise, as well as develop relationships to focus on collaboration. He pursued a position in the parks and recreation industry near a military facility so he could serve injured servicemembers and veterans.

He was hired by Harker Heights Parks and Recreation outside of Ft. Hood, Texas. Harker Heights was awarded a \$23,000 USOC–VA grant in 2010.

Today, more than 80 veterans are participating consistently in an array of physical activity programs led by Joe, and an additional 200 wounded warriors are participating in programming.

Harker Heights hired a hero. I would like to recognize U.S. Army Veteran, Joe Brown, who is with us today.

[Applause.]

And again, I would like to thank the Committee, VA leadership, and organizational partners with us today for entrusting the VA and USOC in a partnership that is so critical to supporting our Nation's finest.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Huebner appears on p. 56.]

Mr. STUTZMAN. Thank you. And Mr. Brown we obviously want to recognize you and appreciate your service, and what an amazing story and one of the real heroes in our country and I appreciate you being here today as well.

So, Mr. Nowak, you are recognized.

STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER NOWAK

Mr. NOWAK. Thank you. Good morning Chairman Stutzman, Ranking Member Braley, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am Chris Nowak, Director of the Office of National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events, Department of Veterans Affairs.

I am honored to be here today to share the success of the partnership between the VA and the USOC.

I am also a disabled Marine veteran, and I believe my personal participation in adaptive sports as part of my rehabilitation provides me with a unique perspective in this very important VA program.

Adaptive sports can be an integral part of a veterans rehabilitation from traumatic injury, illness or disease.

My office is committed to providing veterans with the opportunity to engage in adaptive sports as part of their comprehensive rehabilitative program based on clinical outcomes.

Our partnership with the USOC allows us to provide adaptive sporting opportunities year-round in the veterans community where they live.

Public Law 110-389 authorized the formation of the Office of National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events, which is to be headed by a Director who reports to the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, or an appropriate official within the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA).

When I joined the team as its first director in February 2011 the office managed all VA Paralympic-related programs to include grants, allowances, outreach, and reported to the secretary as necessary.

On September 22, 2011, the VA's existing office of National Programs and Special Events was merged with the National VA Rehabilitation Special Events, was consolidated into one office, Office of the National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events.

This consolidation permits more efficient utilization of personnel and increased capacity and flexibility to support VA adaptive sports and art therapy programs at the community and national level.

I now oversee VA's Paralympic programs as well as the six rehabilitation special events. I report to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

The Office of National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events is currently staffed by 19 full-time employees. These staff not only coordinate VA's partnership with the USOC to include the grant awards and oversight, monthly allowance to assist veterans and related outreach, but to also plan and manage the six VA National Rehabilitation Special Events.

Additionally, the office coordinates VA's commemorative event activities, such as the National Veterans Day Observance, and manages VA's participation in the National Memorial Day observance.

The Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act also authorized VA to seek sponsorships and donations from the private sector to defray the cost of carrying out the integrated adaptive sports program.

As Director, my focus has been to ensure proper use of VA grant funding, enact the monthly allowance, and develop outreach materials.

I have also taken steps to establish sponsorship as an objective for 2012. These steps include, establishing a Deputy Director within the office with the capacity to develop clinical support for adaptive sports programs. This will allow us to validate the clinical benefits of adaptive sports as a form of rehabilitation.

Developing promotional materials that will aid in recruitment of eligible veterans as well as potential sponsors. These materials include adaptive sports brochures, posters, fact sheets, outreach tool kits, Web-based, and Web sites.

In fiscal year 2010, VA entered into a MOU with the USOC to provide Paralympic sport programming and additional community support, including funding resources to injured servicemembers and veterans across the country.

VA subsequently awarded \$7.5 million to the USOC for the integrated adaptive sports program.

VA also published regulation, provided developed forms, and established process for awarding the monthly allowances as authorized by the public law.

Moving forward in 2012, I expect to see greater coordination with the VA as we consolidate the National Rehabilitation Special Events and Paralympic programs, while continuing to develop our relationship with the USOC.

The overarching objective is to provide disabled veterans with adaptive sporting opportunities year-round and to ensure these opportunities are consistent with the appropriate clinical guidelines to aid in their rehabilitation.

While the VA continues to improve its current National Rehabilitation Special Events program, VA is continuing to look at new ways to enhance the rehabilitation experiences of our veterans. We are meeting the challenges head on and constantly exploring ways to strengthen our partnership with the USOC.

This concludes my statement, and will answer questions, sir.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Nowak appears on p. 58.]

Mr. STUTZMAN. Okay. Thank you to both of you.

I would like to start questions with Mr. Huebner. You mentioned the need to establish regional directors. Could you expound on that a little bit and what your thoughts are regarding that?

Mr. HUEBNER. And everything we are doing I just want to emphasize is based on our learnings, based on input from many of the organizations that you heard from earlier and what we are seeing happening in the field.

One of the unique roles we play, and we are very humbled by it, we understand we have a very powerful brand, and when you go into a community, and I will use Chicago as an example, there are 23 different parks and rec agencies. There is the park district, there are VA facilities, there are 30 some odd organizations all fighting for the same piece of pie. And the message that we jointly have really developed and shared and have learned from is that if we work together, we could grow that pie. We could have a larger impact. We can collaborate to create more efficiencies. But to make that happen, to expect, and you heard earlier, some of those organizations are three person shops with a \$300,000 budget, some of them are \$8 million organizations that have, you know, 120 staff. To get those entities to work together their focus is usually on what their mission is and not to go out and work with 24 other agencies in a region.

We have seen significant impact based on that regional focus, especially from a neutral party. And one of the benefits we have seen is coming in together as VA and USOC, it does create that, you know, and we saw this in Iowa with 75 organizations coming together for a Summit and I think the fact that it was an Iowa Sports Foundation U.S. Olympic Committee led initiative, it created excitement, it created a ground swell for us in the State of Iowa, but it also I think created excitement for some of the people in Iowa to be able to partner with a national organization called the United States Olympic Committee.

So creating that focus, and I know programmatic staff always comes up as an issue no doubt, I have that same conversation with my Chief Executive Officer (CEO) on a daily basis, but having some focused leadership in targeted places we believe, and this is a conversation Chris and I have had, we believe can allow for a greater impact and a greater efficiency, especially as it relates to getting people to work together.

And I think as we heard earlier, you know, all the different, how do we connect the dots, how do we let, you know, a WTU or an active-duty soldier leaving know about the VA program and the VA program know at the community program? Having somebody focused, and we have that person in Chicago who is just doing fabulous work, really allows us to become more effective and efficient for a minimal investment.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Would that person be a VA or a USOC employee?

Mr. HUEBNER. Don't make me go back to my CEO and ask for more head count.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Okay.

Mr. HUEBNER. You know, the way we look at it, and I say this every day, we don't deliver a program in a box. I think it is a discussion based on the market. In some cases, in Chicago we have partnered with World Sport Chicago, which has incredible leader-

ship, it is a partnership agency of ours, it has great recognition, so it is a VA-USOC partnership with World Sport Chicago.

In some markets, it might be a USOC-0led employee, in other markets it might be a VA-led employee.

So I think that is a discussion based on what is going to be the most significant impact in the market.

One of the things that we have allowed to do, and you know, Joe Brown brought this today and it is back to that awareness question of we have allowed our brand to be used by our partners, so World Sport has Paralympic in their title, so it is an employee of World Sport, but it is a VA-USOC program and we are allowing them to say this is a Paralympic program, which is something pretty unusual for us.

So really, I think it goes back to what is going to have the most impact in a region, in a market and make the decision based on that.

Mr. STUTZMAN. And you mentioned \$40 million in grants; is that correct?

Mr. HUEBNER. We are tracking this, and we are going to track more importantly moving forward for all the entities we are working with, what their programmatic budgets are, what their private resources, their staff, their facilities and all that it is north of \$40 million that the partners that we gave grants to are investing with their own resources.

So we are feeling that, you know, the leverage of a grant, and I can speak to this in Colorado Springs. There was no programming in Colorado Springs for veterans or for persons with physical disabilities or injured servicemembers. You have Fort Carson, a major veteran population. People were driving an hour to 2 hours to play wheelchair basketball on a monthly basis at the program north of Denver. Today, there is a program lead by Colorado Springs Parks and Recreation, a Paralympic sport club that is serving veterans in the community and Fort Carson with consistent weekly basketball programming and multiple sport programming. But the most important thing, they brought their own budget of \$400,000, their own staff to the table to deliver that, plus they went out and raised additional resources, because we provided a \$25,000 seed grant from the U.S. Olympic Committee and VA that they went and leveraged to increase resources.

So they are the primary funder of the program, we have just provided a targeted grant for them to focus on veterans.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Has the new grant program, has that helped your ability to raise money privately?

Mr. HUEBNER. I think it has helped our agencies that we are working with, and I think any of the panelists behind me, we have heard this consistently, it has really helped them leverage relationships, and Kirk talked about the three to one, you know, dollars in terms of raising, it has helped them to leverage our involvement with them.

And I will use a specific example of a quote from a foundation leader in Chicago, it is a \$1 billion community trust. He said point-blank, the reason they wrote a \$125,000 check to World Sport was because of the national, regional, and local collaboration that we brought to the table with the VA and with the local entities and

that was compelling to them because it showed efficiencies in collaboration and an elimination of duplication.

So that local entity didn't write the check to us, they wrote the check to our partner organization that is implementing the program, and in our mind our role in all of this was to grow the resource pie for the agencies that are implementing it at the community level, and we have seen multiple feedback from multiple agencies that that is happening. It is something we hope to track better going forward in our grant process and in evaluation process.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Thank you. Mr. Braley.

Mr. BRALEY. Mr. Nowak, Semper Fi.

My dad landed on Hiroshima the same day that both flags were raised on Mount Suribachi, and Mr. Brown, he also had a similar experience to you in his life because he fell 35 feet from the grain elevator that he was working at when I was 2 years old and was lucky to survive, as were you. We are so glad that you are with us here today, but he walked the rest of his life with a 2 inch lift in his heel in his right leg, and back then programs like the ones we are talking about weren't able to our Nation's veterans.

And so I learned to play golf from my uncle, who is also a World War II veteran and didn't face the same challenges walking the hilly course in my hometown of Brooklyn, Iowa, that my father did.

So one of the things that we are concerned about here today is the fact that in a State like Iowa where you have an extensive deployment of our National Guard on a regular basis, they come back to communities where there is no large military installation, reintegrate with the small towns and rural areas that they came from. A lot of times those areas don't have the same type of programs available on a larger scale like some of the ones that we have been talking to.

My staff and I have a challenge because it is hard for us even to track these disabled veterans when they go to Walter Reed or Bethesda, to Brooke, to the Polytrauma Center in Minneapolis. They are constantly moving back and forth, and a lot of times when they finally get to their ultimate destination that is when they are really focused on the future.

So how can we work with you to help identify people who can benefit from these fantastic programs, reconnect them with the passions they had before their disability, and help marry them and their interests in athletics to the types of services that are available from the VA?

Mr. NOWAK. Well, sir, I think that is a great question. And with my office, what we are doing is taking that as an objective that we need to tackle head on, and we are doing that in a couple different ways. And that is using our Web site that we have, with find a sports club finder, which links with the USOC, partnering with the USOC to have that educational experience for VA clinicians, and I think they are the gatekeepers for the good portion of this, and my office is working to develop tools that will allow them to help these veterans find these services in their community.

So we do recognize that and we are working on that. It is a constant communication. It is communicating, letting these veterans know that these opportunities are there and they are there in their community, that they don't have to come to the VA forum. And

that is why this partnership is successful and needs to continue, is we have so many veterans that don't live close to VAs that need adaptive sports, so partnering with the USOC allows us to provide them that.

Mr. BRALEY. Well, Mr. Huebner, I want to thank you for coming to Iowa and being part of that conference and putting a face on your organization and its broader reach in the real world beyond what we see every 4 years when we watch a spectacle on our television sets.

One of the things that I am so proud of is that Mike Boone, who testified earlier, talked about getting the initial information about the opportunities these grants provide through his conversation with you.

One of the things that we are all interested in is how we can use these programs to educate the broader public to the benefits that this investment of their hard earned tax dollars makes not just for our wounded warriors, but for our country.

And I talked earlier about some of those benefits. But I think one of the things that you have seen through your work in these programs is how they have the ability to motivate and inspire others, and I would like you to talk about that if you could and the impact you have seen from the work that your organization has done.

Mr. HUEBNER. Yes, it is pretty overwhelming, and it was an honor to spend that day in Iowa, and I have to tell you you talk about leadership, the Iowa Sports Foundation and what they are doing to have 75 organizations from all over the State, all different, Red Cross, sport organizations, veteran organizations, phenomenal, and that is how we meet the need.

And the nice thing about it is the model that we are implementing together is a training and technical assistance model. So if there is a veteran returning to Grinnell and the entity in Grinnell is a YMCA we can go in cost efficiently and provide training to that YMCA on how to provide sport programming for a person with a physical disability, and that is what makes this so incredibly efficient and effective, and the resources allow us to have significant impact.

In terms of the awareness, and your timing is impeccable, sir, major league baseball is in the playoffs right now and college football is in the throws of their season, and one of our partners, and this is one of the things we are leveraging with our partners, we are asking them to feature veterans in their ad campaigns. So the Hartford had a \$75 million ad campaign during March Madness this past year featuring Melissa Stockwell, a veteran, an employed veteran who made our Paralympics team in 2008. I mean she is on the Wounded Warrior Project Board. We were just talking earlier with my colleague from the Wounded Warrior Project. I mean this young lady she is just remarkable. I mean she started her own nonprofit foundation in Chicago to promote triathlon, but they featured her and they are running ads as we speak. I saw one last night during the baseball game featuring her in a national ad campaign, and to me it is just telling all Americans about the incredible young men and women that serve and the achievements that they can have regardless of their disability.

And this morning I made a recommendation to a major multi-national company that happens to be an international partner of ours who they have requested a veteran in their lead-up campaigns to London.

And you talked a little bit about awareness. We are implementing multiple strategies. And when I say we, it is we collectively. Multiple strategies to reach young men and women. And my Marine friend over here, I have an Army first sergeant dad so I try and bust his chops any time I can, but I know just by listening to Marines, and I saw somebody back here with a globe and anchor bag, that they usually pay more attention when they get something that has Semper Fi on it. So it might not be USOC, it might not be VA, but if you put something with Semper Fi on it, those Marines usually open it and read it.

So we are implementing multiple awareness strategies to targeted audiences based on their interests, and especially in this new age of social media and technology, that is something that we are implementing as we move forward, it is really being targeted about our communication. We are developing USOC-VA communication and awareness strategies, but we are also targeting some specific strategies to these audiences, because we host an event called Warrior Games, which the VA and the DoD and the USOC will collaborate on that 177 media participated in, national television coverage. I will make sure each of you get a copy of the national program that was aired after the games.

But you know, talking with those five different service branches, I mean, the Coast Guard and the Marines talk different languages, and we have to be smart enough to make sure we are creating communication and awareness materials to those special audiences as well as nationally.

And nationally, our research shows that there is 70-percent awareness now about Paralympic sport in the United States. Pre 2002, it was less than 5 percent, so we are making progress there, and one of the reasons we are making progress is because our partners, the media, and the American public want to hear about these young men and women who have done so much to serve us, and we are making sure that we share those stories, and it is in our objectives for 2012 is to make sure we share more success stories about people like Joe Brown.

Mr. BRALEY. I am going to show you, I wish I had the ability to show everyone on the screen, proof of what you were just talking about. Because one of the most challenging things any of us does is walk into the intensive care unit at a place like Walter Reed or Bethesda with a wounded warrior who has just returned without his arms, without his legs, and meet with them and their families as they are facing an uncertain future.

And I had the honor of walking into Bethesda and meeting a young Marine from Dubuque, Iowa, named Christopher Billmyer, who had a bilateral above the knee amputation and was very, very concerned about what kind of a future he would have. And I put two things in his hand when I walked in. One was a coin with the flag raising at Hiroshima and the words Semper Fidelis on the back as a message from my father who has been gone for 30 years.

And the other was a bottle of champagne to open when he walked for the first time on his own.

And I recently had the thrill of welcoming him home to Dubuque, along with about 15,000 other Iowans who lined the streets from the airport to his home, and one of the things that caught my attention was the stubbies he brought home with him, including shoes made at New Balance here in the United States in the Marine Corps colors with the globe and anchor logo and Semper Fi on the instep, which is exactly what you are talking about.

And I can guarantee you he will have a lot more motivation to keep working to gain his mobility back because of those shoes, and we have to develop specific programs and assistive devices for our disabled veterans that inspire them to inspire us.

So I thank you both for your testimony and look forward to working with you to make this a reality for all disabled veterans.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Thank you, Mr. Barley.

I would like to follow up just a little bit with you, Mr. Nowak. On outreach, what is the VA doing as far as outreach? Is there the ability to use mailings, TV ads, social media, plenty of opportunities in communicating?

Mr. NOWAK. Yes, sir. Currently we are using social media, we are doing mailings, we have a poster campaign that is going to print now that will be delivered to all the VA medical centers, all the VBA offices, all the Vet Centers, as well as to all of the OIF/OEF coordinators and their offices as well throughout the country that shows the transition from warrior to adaptive sport athlete.

We already did some test marketing with that and received very, very good reviews. We partner with the USOC on that to developing these products. We are doing that.

We are getting a lot of inquires from our Web site that veterans are going on looking for adaptive sports and different ways, so right now we are targeting those two areas, and as we move forward in 2012, we are looking to go to a broader more public type of target audience at that time.

Mr. STUTZMAN. With mailings are you able to use when checks are sent out, inserts to notify vets that programs are available?

Mr. NOWAK. Right now, sir, we are doing mailings. We do have a booklet that is going to print that outlines all of the grants that have been awarded to the USOC and what those adaptive sports are and where they can be delivered.

As far as checks go out, unfortunately, we really don't mail that many checks out, which is good, it is all direct deposit, but we do have mailings out and that is one area we will look into is direct mailing to the veteran, sir.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Sure. Okay. And then I guess finally to Mr. Huebner, I mentioned the expanding of the coverage of the Paralympics Games. I know there was some coverage of last winter games. Can you tell us anything what is being arranged for the London Games?

Mr. HUEBNER. Yeah, I was with my CEO yesterday talking about that exact subject. We want to enhance robust coverage of the games no doubt as the U.S. Olympic Committee, and a lot of people don't know our focus on Paralympics is really new. We are in our infancy. And one of our objectives is to create robust coverage, but

also create using new media, expanded coverage, and we are in negotiations right now regarding the rights.

The U.S. does not own the rights to broadcast the games in the United States, the International Paralympics Committee and the Local Organizing Committee in London owns those rights, but we are in negotiations right now and our plan is to hopefully innovate in developing a robust broadcast of the games, but also expanding the coverage, especially the daily coverage of what we can push back to viewers in the United States, whether it is online, streaming, You Tube, looking at a multifaceted approach.

But you know, in the past three games, we announced our coverage in Italy 2 weeks after the games started, in 2008 3 days before, last year a month before. Our goal by the end of this year is to announce some coverage plans for the 2012 games, which we feel is an incredible opportunity just because of the history of the movement, especially with the veteran involvement from both the U.S. and United Kingdom, and we are going to be very focused on telling that veterans story at the Paralympics Games in 2012.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Do any of the U.S. networks currently have rights to the games?

Mr. HUEBNER. NBC has rights to the Olympic Games. The Paralympic, they are two separate organizations, International Olympic Committee, International Paralympic Committee, so we are in discussions and negotiations right now with the International Paralympic Committee, the local Organizing Committee about the rights, and then also having at the same time discussions with U.S. networks.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Very good. Well, I am looking forward to it and excited about it, and I just want to thank both of you for being here. And I would also like the mention—do you have any other questions? Okay. Any further comments from either one of you?

Mr. NOWAK. Yes, sir. I know the earlier panel was talking about the grant process. Myself and Mr. Huebner have spent a lot of time over the last couple months examining that and how we can redefine that the VA has a new grant management office that is working with us, and we will have that corrected before next year.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Very good. I think you can tell, and I am speaking for the other Committee Members that aren't here, I know that this is the type of program that is something we can go back home and be excited about and also share with veterans that are in our communities. And so the success of this program is obviously very important to this Committee, and we want to be here to help in any way that it can be successful, but obviously execution is really up to you all, and we hope that that is continued as you work together you will find continued support with that.

So I would also like to mention finally that this Subcommittee is going to hold two field hearings. We are going to be in Iowa. Looking forward to being out in Hawkeye country with Ranking Member Braley, and that will be on October 17th, and October 19th we will be holding a hearing in Ft. Wayne as well. So we look forward to meeting your constituents and of course showing you some Hoosier hospitality.

Mr. BRALEY. And I would just like to note, Mr. Chairman, that both Waterloo, Iowa, and Ft. Wayne, Indiana, were original mem-

bers of the National Basketball Association, and that is why you should be interested in participating.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Ft. Wayne Pistons, actually, that is right. That is right.

So any closing remarks?

Mr. BRALEY. No, just to thank everyone who came here today and remind us all about why these programs are important not just for the athletes they affect but for the greater good that they provide to us as a country and as a society.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Very good. And I just want to thank the VA, the U.S. Paralympics, and each of your partners for being part of helping in the process of rehabilitating our veterans, and we are all very proud of them and want to see them have every opportunity after they have served our country.

So with that, this Subcommittee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:56 a.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

Prepared Statement of Hon. Marlin Stutzman, Chairman Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity

Good morning. This Committee's first responsibility to our veterans is enable those injured in military service have the broadest opportunity to rehabilitate themselves and that is what today's oversight hearing is all about.

While I was not a Member of the 110th Congress, one of the legislative bright spots was the provision in Public Law 110-389 that established the VA-U.S.Paralympics Adaptive Sports Program, an initiative to expand the use of sports as part of a veteran's rehabilitation program.

To do that, the law authorizes \$8 million per year to fund veteran adaptive sports programs from the local level through elite levels of competition. The law limits use of the funds to disabled veterans and servicemembers and includes a provision to pay a per diem to those selected to participate in high-level adaptive sports competitions.

There was a good reason to direct VA to partner with U.S.Paralympics and that was to use the cache of the Olympic brand and its ability to attract local and national organizations. Just as important, we saw how the Olympic brand would attract disabled veterans to adaptive sports.

Given what we will hear today, that strategy has worked very well. It appears that thousands more disabled veterans are now involved in adaptive sports and at the elite levels, our national Paralympic and adaptive sports teams now include many more disabled veterans. It seems the program is also fostering further cooperation between adaptive sports clubs and programs at the local and national level.

While the Paralympics has yet to draw the viewership like the Olympics, I believe the next steps would be to expand media coverage and I would ask Mr. Huebner to include their media plans in his remarks.

In short, I believe the VA-U.S.Paralympics program is the right thing at the right time and this why I have introduced H.R. 2345, which extends this program through 2018. I am happy that we were able to favorably report H.R. 2345 to the Full Committee in July, and I look forward to its consideration at the Full Committee.

Before I recognize the Ranking Member, I believe it is important to mention the role of recreational therapy as part of rehabilitation. When Staff visited a Midwestern VA medical center and asked the Director about the hospital's rec therapy program, the reply was, "We don't have Bingo here." I find that myopic view of a well-documented rehabilitation resource incredible and I intend to speak with Chairwoman Buerkle about taking a look at VA's national recreational therapy program—or lack of a program. If nothing else, it should be a major source of participants for the VA-Paralympic program.

I now recognize to the distinguished Ranking Member, Mr. Braley for his opening remarks.

Prepared Statement of Hon. Bruce Braley, Ranking Democratic Member

Since the early years of our country, Congress has had to reassess programs created to care for our men and women in uniform, our veterans who have courageously answered the call to duty, and their families who have shared in the military experience.

Fortunately, this Congress stands united in support of our members of the Armed Forces and veterans who deserve the best resources we can muster to help them succeed in life after their military service. Paralympics sports have been used as a method of adaptive sports therapy since World War II. Paralympics continue to pro-

vide rehabilitation services to our disabled servicemembers who continue to use them successfully and these services have proven to be popular.

Today's hearing will give the Subcommittee the opportunity to hear from the U.S. Olympic Committee how the Paralympics program, first authorized under Public Law 110-389 on October 10, 2008, has assisted our servicemembers and veterans to heal from the wounds of war. The price of war is not paid by money alone; servicemember that are called upon to serve on behalf of our country pay the ultimate price. This is especially true for those that have made the ultimate sacrifice of life and injury sustained while in service.

I am pleased to welcome Mike Boone, the Director of Adaptive Sports Iowa, who is here to testify today. In March, his organization hosted a forum that brought people together interested in increasing opportunities for persons with physical and visual disabilities to be active in daily physical activity programs. Guests at this forum included the National Guard and the VA Hospital. Although I was unable to attend, my staff was there at the forum. My staff has provided great feedback on the work Adaptive Sports Iowa is doing and how it positively impacts physically disabled athletes.

I also recently had the opportunity to meet with Andy Yohe from Bettendorf, Iowa. He is a member of the Team USA sled hockey team, who in 2006 helped his team win a bronze medal at the Paralympic Winter Games in Torino, Italy. Then he helped the U.S. capture the gold medal at the 2010 Paralympic Winter Games in Vancouver, Canada. He was accompanied in the meeting by U.S. Olympic gymnast and fellow Iowan Shawn Johnson, who has been a tremendous advocate on behalf of the Paralympics. Shawn earned a gold medal and three silver medals at the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, China.

We have an obligation to our servicemembers to provide them the best training and equipment to ensure that they rehabilitate successfully, as well as to provide post-military services to help them live a healthy and active lifestyle in their civilian lives.

Many of my colleagues would agree that the Department of Veterans Affairs provides world class care to our injured servicemembers and veterans. Knowing this, I would like to hear about the VA and USOC Memorandum of Understanding and its implementation. I am very interested to see if there have been any issues of concern in the partnership process. Additionally, I would like to hear about program outreach to veterans, and outreach to other veteran organizations that may help coordinate important events such as the National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

I look forward to continue working with Chairman Stutzman and Members of this Subcommittee to ensure that this program continues to be successful in its mission to provide rehabilitative sports therapy to our injured servicemembers and our veterans.

**Prepared Statement of Colonel Richard G. Cardillo, Jr.,
USA, (Ret.), Military Sport Program Coordinator,
U.S. Association of Blind Athletes**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA) is a Colorado-based nonprofit organization that has provided life-enriching sports opportunities for children, youth and adults who are blind and visually impaired for the past 35 years. Through our partnership with the United States Olympic Committee, USABA has strengthened our collective effort to enhance the lives of disabled Veterans and disabled members of the Armed Forces who are blind and visually impaired in order to enhance their rehabilitation process through sport, physical activity, and recreation and, most importantly to assist them in the reintegration back into their home communities.

This is a collective programming effort with the United States Olympic Committee, the Department of Veterans Affairs as well as national and community-based adaptive sports programs in an effort to enhance the lives of Veterans who are blind and visually impaired. Some of the USABA program accomplishments include:

- Grown programming efforts from 19 Veterans in 2008 to over 300 Veterans today
- Includes recreational, developing, emerging athletes
- Working collaboratively with the VA Blind Rehabilitation Centers
- Integrated/immersed select VA BRC staff into a "train-the-trainer" model

- Constant program expansion
- Promote program participation with other community-based programs
- Established a formal relationship with the Department of Defense Vision Center of Excellence

We see 3 recommendations in enhancing the current program initiative.

- Identification and sharing of contact information
- Re-establish the funding stream from the VA for the continued support to the BRCs
- Spousal and family inclusion in the rehabilitation process

USABA again expresses our thanks for the recent support that the Subcommittee on economic opportunity has made to these various programs over the past 2 years. Our Nation's greatest assets are those individuals who have served and continue to serve . . . and we should continue to provide opportunities for these individuals as best we can for as long as we can.

The United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA) is a Colorado-based nonprofit organization that has provided life-enriching sports opportunities for children, youth and adults who are blind and visually impaired for the past 35 years. Through our partnership with the United States Olympic Committee, USABA has strengthened our collective effort to enhance the lives of disabled Veterans and disabled members of the Armed Forces who are blind and visually impaired in order to enhance their rehabilitation process through sport, physical activity, and recreation and, most importantly to assist them in the reintegration back into their home communities. On behalf of USABA, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to present our views on the partnership and progress between the United States Olympic Committee's Paralympics Division and the Department of Veterans Affairs in promoting adaptive sports for our Nation's Veterans.

This morning I would like to take this opportunity to explain what this initiative has meant to USABA and, more importantly, to highlight some of the accomplishments and the impact this has had over the past 3 years; none of which would be possible without the cooperation and partnership with the United States Olympic Committee, the Department of Veterans Affairs as well as national and community-based adaptive sports programs in an effort to enhance the lives of Veterans who are blind and visually impaired.

- USABA has grown our Operation Mission Vision programming efforts from a start of 19 Veterans interested in enhancing their personal lives through sport and physical activity in 2008 to over 300 Veterans today. Those same Veterans are living at home and training in local community-based fitness centers around the United States.
- Chuck Sketch, U.S. Marine Corps, Wildomar, California, blind and double above the knee amputee: "Participation in sports has put my life into advanced hyper-drive! Today, I'm living a life that my sighted friends can only dream of."
- Many of these Veterans have recognized the health benefits that physical activity has on improving their daily lives. A select few of those Veterans have been able to take their level of physical activity and skills to a higher level through the U.S. Paralympic emerging athlete program in hopes of making the U.S. Paralympic National team. For example:
 - Chester Triplett, U.S. Army, Mooresville, North Carolina: recently participated at the U.S. Track Nationals in Tandem Cycling in Carson, CA in hopes of making the U.S. Paralympic National Team; Chester won the 200 meter time trial, placed 2nd in the 1,000 meter time trial and qualified to compete in the 2012 Para-Cycling World Track Championships in the city of Los Angeles in February.
- Through our Military Sport Program, we work directly with the VA staff at 9 of the 13 VA Blind Rehabilitation Centers (BRCs) in an effort to enhance the rehabilitation programs at the VA BRCs by assisting them in connecting with local community-based organizations, and in some cases, Paralympic Sport Clubs. Examples include:
 - Southeastern BRC in Birmingham, AL currently takes Veterans on a weekly basis to the Lakeshore Foundation; a local Paralympic Sport Club. The Lakeshore Foundation is an Alabama-based non-profit organization that promotes independence for persons with physically disabling conditions and provides opportunities to pursue active, healthy lifestyles;

- Western BRC in Palo Alto, CA has a tremendous weekly relationship with a local tandem cycling club and is developing a working relationship with the Riekes Center for Human Enhancement; a local Paralympic Sport Club. The Riekes Center for Human Enhancement is a California-based non-profit organization that offers programs in athletic fitness, creative arts and nature awareness;
- American Lakes BRC in Tacoma, WA has a golfing program with a local community golf course and is working to expand their programming efforts with the Tacoma Parks and Recreation and a local community-based rowing program.
- We've worked closely with the Department of Veterans Affairs over the past 2 years on immersing select VA BRC recreation therapists and specialists into our summer sports program in a "train-the-trainer" model. The adaptive sports programming knowledge gained is easily transferable back into the BRC recreation efforts.
- We are continuously expanding existing programming efforts to include greater Veteran participation at USABA's Operation Mission Vision sports programs; such as developmental and learn to race cycling and rowing camps; and the California International Marathon.
- Gilbert Magallanes, U.S. Army, Clarksville, Tennessee: "Without USABA's Operation Mission and many other programs that help wounded Soldiers, I wouldn't have gotten past my injury or depression as easy. I'm no longer depressed. I stayed off the couch. I used to weigh 287 pounds and now I'm 213; and I'm not going back. I'm not quitting. Playing sports and staying active outside saved my life."
- We encourage and assist Veteran participation at other community-based programs, U.S. Paralympic programs and VA adaptive sports programs being offered around the United States.
- Lonnie Bedwell, U.S.Navy, Dugger, Indiana: (See Attached Exhibit A.)
- Facilitated in establishing a memorandum of understanding between the U.S.Paralympic Military Program and the Department of Defense Vision Center of Excellence (DoD VCoE). This memorandum of understanding strengthens the on-going relationship between the two organizations and will continue to enhance the rehabilitation of Veterans and injured Servicemembers who are blind and visually impaired.

We see three recommendations in enhancing the current program initiative. In working with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense Vision Center of Excellence, our first recommendation for program improvement is the identification and sharing of contact information for every disabled Veteran who is blind and visually impaired. Having that level of accessibility would then maximize our efforts in reaching out to all disabled Veterans who are blind and visually impaired. Secondly, USABA would like to re-establish the funding stream from the Department of Veterans Affairs to allow for the continuation of support and services to the VA Blind Rehabilitation Centers in order to enhance the lives of Veterans who are blind and visually impaired. Thirdly, with the continuation of this initiative, we would like to see an expansion of the current programming efforts to include the Veteran's spouse and family. Having spent the first 53 years of my life in the military I know all too well the positive influence the military family has on the servicemember. The inclusion of the family in these programming efforts is paramount to the success of the Veteran's rehabilitation.

USABA again expresses our thanks for the recent support that the Subcommittee on economic opportunity has made to these various programs over the past 2 years. Our Nation's greatest assets are those individuals who have served and continue to serve . . . and we should continue to provide opportunities for these individuals as best we can for as long as we can. On behalf of USABA, I've appreciated the opportunity to testify today and I will be glad to answer any questions at this time.

17 MARCH 2011

To Whom it May Concern,

I want to start this letter by thanking everyone involved with putting this program together. As you will soon tell, I am not very good with words. So please forgive me as it is truly heart felt. When I sit back and reflect on this past weekend I am so humbled and grateful. I had the opportunity to meet a little 7 year old vis-

ually impaired girl who is completely full of life. I am in awe of someone that never had the blessings in life to see as many years as I did. I also met a man who sacrificed so much in combat and spent months in hospitals and has had 58 surgeries to piece him back together. Even after all of these surgeries he is still not whole. Not to mention all of the others who I was so fortunate to meet. You can never walk in another man's shoes. But, you can gain knowledge as well as draw strength and inspiration from their life's experience.

Whether you realize it or not, you have made a major impact on so many lives. Here are a few things you have done for those of us who had the opportunity to participate in this program. We have developed new friendships that in some cases I'm sure will last for years. Walls that were solid, you not only placed a door in them; you also opened it for us. You have provided us with a new sense of hope and drive. Thoughts like the following once again go through my mind: "I really can do this." "I wonder how much better at this I can get?"; and "just what else can I really do?". In my mind aren't these wonderful thoughts?

With regards to my family, here are some of the things you have done for them: you placed tears of joy in my mother's eyes. My father told me "I'm proud of you son". At the age of 45 this almost brings tears to my eyes. As for the rest of my family it also provides them with joy and a new sense of strength.

In my community you have put me on a platform to help others as you have helped me. What a humbling honor this is. In just a few short weeks of people finding out I was heading to Colorado and 2 days of being back the following has happened. Almost a countless number of people have called my house or approached me to talk. A mother came up to me crying and thanking me. She said "You don't know how much of a difference you make in my daughter's life as she watches and listens to you". A couple said "You make us realize how little we have to complain about". A gentleman talked with me for 30 minutes about the whole event in the local restaurant. That I know of, I had never spoken to any of these people before. This doesn't include the others I don't know and those I do.

For those who put this program together, took care of us at the lodge, guided us on the slopes, and financially supported this I want to thank you once again. So you see, you have not only touched the lives of those of us privileged enough to participate in this event. You have touched the lives of literally hundreds. I just hope that I can represent all of your efforts and support in a manner that will also make you proud.

Sincerely

Lonnie R. Bedwell
U.S.Navy
Dugger, Indiana

EXHIBIT A

Prepared Statement of Michael Charles Boone, Director, Adaptive Sports Iowa, Iowa Sports Foundation, Ames, IA

Chairman Stutzman, Ranking Member Braley and Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate and am humbled to appear before you today to discuss the partnership between the United States Olympic Committee: Paralympic Division and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I've never had the honor to serve within the United States military. As a citizen of this country I cannot express enough the gratitude I have for the sacrifice these honorable men and women of our armed forces make. As a professional in the adaptive sports industry, I realized that I can have an impact on the lives of those who have come home with a physical disability. The opportunities I can provide will have a positive effect on the quality of life for both the injured members and their families.

Prior to 2010, the state of Iowa lacked the organization and infrastructure to support the development of a successful and sustainable sport and recreation program for the physically disabled. The Iowa Sports Foundation recognized this need and our ability to fill the void. Our organization possesses the leadership and organization to make a difference within the state of Iowa and serve as a catalyst for change.

Adaptive Sports Iowa is our answer to Iowa's need for adaptive sport and recreation programming. Officially kicking off in March 2011, Adaptive Sports Iowa was established with the mission of creating, organizing and promoting sport and recreation opportunities for Iowa's physically disabled population. The Adaptive Sports

Iowa Summit, our kickoff event, was held with the intention of bringing together like-minded organizations, groups and individuals within the state of Iowa. I would like to personally thank Congressman Braley for sending a member of his staff to this event. The Adaptive Sports Iowa Summit was intended to introduce our new program to the public and to be a forum to discuss and gather information on the needs of Iowa's physically disabled population. The Summit was a tremendous success and produced positive results that have helped guide Adaptive Sports Iowa as we continue to plan future programs.

As a part of the Summit, we were honored to host Charlie Hubener, Chief of U.S. Paralympics. Mr. Hubener came to observe the event and to present Adaptive Sports Iowa with a \$25,000 grant from the U.S. Paralympics and the Department of Veterans' Affairs. This grant allowed for us to purchase new equipment and begin a program that would target physically disabled veterans in the state of Iowa.

With the promise of that grant money, we launched *Operation: ASI*, a program specially intended for Iowa's physically disabled veterans. To assist in the planning and coordination of the new program we formed a committee to oversee it. The Committee was comprised of representatives from the Iowa National Guard, the Central Iowa Veterans' Affairs Health Care System, Paralyzed Veterans of America-Iowa Chapter and myself.

According to a Cornell University report, in 2009 close to 5 percent of Iowa's 139,000+ veteran population live with a service-connected disability.¹ That accounts for more than 18,000 physically disabled veterans living in Iowa. This is a significant number of people who could take advantage of Operation: ASI.

We held our first event on July 9, 2011 which was set up as an expo to introduce veterans to a variety of different activities. We had stations for golf, hand cycling and so that an individual could "sample" each activity as well as a display for target shooting.

The partnership between the U.S. Paralympics and the Department of Veterans' Affairs is an important and successful collaboration with great potential. Nationally, there are organizations that provide adaptive sports and recreation programs in their respective communities and regions. The overwhelming majority of these organizations work independently from each other with limited communication and collaboration between organizations. U.S. Paralympics is in the unique position to provide the necessary leadership and guidance to these organizations to assist in the development of nationwide grass roots support system. We attribute much of the success of Adaptive Sports Iowa to this same concept. Prior to the existence of Adaptive Sports Iowa, adaptive sports and recreation opportunities were extremely limited within Iowa. Upon further research and examination into the needs of Iowa, we determined that the pieces were in place to create our organization. Overall, the need was there but the leadership was not. By providing that leadership we have experienced tremendous success within our programs.

There are a couple areas of improvement I suggest the Subcommittee examine to improve this partnership:

1. The U.S. Paralympics has the passion, organization, and resources to provide opportunities to demographics that the Department of Veterans Affairs is targeting to serve. It is in the best interest of those veterans that these two organizations continue to work together. I do see opportunity for this relationship to develop. For example, The Iowa Sports Foundation's fiscal years ended on September 30. To date, our 2011 grant awarded to us in March from the Department of Veteran's affairs has not yet arrived. Adaptive Sports Iowa is fortunate to be part of an organization that could support the purchases and commitments we made to begin *Operation: ASI* but that is not the case for most adaptive sports organizations.
2. There is a need to more efficiently disseminate information regarding our programs to disabled veterans. Informing younger and recently disabled veterans has been a significant stumbling block for our organization. When a physically disabled soldier returns home following rehab there is currently no way for our organization to inform them of our programming opportunities. An easy and immediate improvement to this partnership is to establish a way for soon-to-be released rehabbing soldiers to be informed of the adaptive sports opportunities near their home.

¹Erickson, W., Lee, C., von Schrader, S. (2010, March 17). Disability Statistics from the 2008 American Community Survey (ACS). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics (StatsRRTC). Retrieved Sep 30, 2011 from www.disabilitystatistics.org.

In closing, I would like to thank the Committee and the Department of Veterans' Affairs for your support of adaptive programming for physically disabled veterans. I grew up in a household with a blind father. While he was not a veteran, I saw firsthand how opportunities like these can change lives. What you are doing matters a great deal and will have a positive and lasting impact for the program participants, their family and friends, and their communities.

Appendix A

OPERATION ADAPTIVE SPORTS IOWA

Operation ASI is designed to perform the following deliverables:

1. Develop a new program, *Operation ASI*, with the goal of increasing adaptive sports and recreation opportunities for Iowa's disabled veterans by the elements listed below:
 - a. Organize, promote and administer a variety of adaptive sport and recreational programs targeting at least thirty (30) disabled veterans by introducing them to a variety of activities such as basic fitness and access to instruction and equipment in cycling, bowling, golf and target shooting with consistent weekly and/or bi-weekly training;
 - b. Increase the existing adaptive sport and recreation opportunities in Iowa to include cycling, bocchia, golf, and target shooting for disabled veterans with consistent weekly and/or bi-weekly training opportunities;
 - c. In recent years, Central Iowa has witnessed development of many recreational trails. It's important that many of these programs offer the opportunity for training and participation away from VA and military campuses. There are many facilities and locations the above mentioned activities can take place that can effectively serve the needs of the program participants.
 - d. Assist a minimum of five (5) disabled veterans in participating in and completing a competitive level and/or recreational event in any of the above mentioned activities.
 - i. By working closely with the Iowa Games (another program of the Iowa Sports Foundation), competitive opportunities will be available and accessible to any and all disabled veterans that have a desire to participate.
 - ii. RAGBRAI, an annual cycling event in Iowa with roughly 25,000 participants will be a target event for our program participants. Progress has already been made with integrating an adaptive specific team and disabled veterans within this program will have the opportunity to participate with this team.
 - e. Obtain the appropriate and necessary equipment for the above mentioned activities that matches the needs of the targeted disabled veterans.
 - f. Increase the number of disabled veterans participating in a Paralympic Sport at any level to ten (10) or more
 2. Organize and administer outreach efforts for recruitment, educational and public awareness purposes:
 - a. Educate at least sixty (60) disabled veterans about adaptive sports opportunities available to them locally and throughout Iowa.
 - b. Collaborate with the following organizations to identify community organizations and contacts that can assist in the promotion of this program to reach disabled veterans.
 - i. Veterans Affairs Central Iowa Health Care System
 - ii. Iowa National Guard
 - iii. Paralyzed Veterans of America—Iowa Chapter
 - c. Organize and administer a "kickoff" event for disabled veterans and veterans organizations no later than July 31, 2011
 - d. U.S.Olympic Committee, Paralympic Division will be recognized appropriately as a supporter of this program in local media and publicity.
-

**Prepared Statement of Tina Acosta, MS, TR, Director,
Adult Day Services and Adaptive Sports and Recreation,
Turnstone Center for Children and Adults with Disabilities,
Ft. Wayne, IN, and Secretary, Indiana Association of Adult Day Services**

Executive Summary

Physical fitness activities are important to all people, but even more so for people with disabilities. A person who is physically fit protects his or her physical and mental health and enjoys a greater quality of life. In northeast Indiana, more than 150,000 persons over the age of 5 are living with a disability. Veterans with disabilities account for approximately 5 percent of this figure. Unfortunately, people with disabilities have few opportunities to participate in fitness related activities. There are a plethora of opportunities in the region for persons without disabilities to play sports, build strength and engage in leisure activities, but for people with disabilities, these opportunities are inaccessible or simply unavailable.

In 1995, Turnstone addressed this lack of sports, recreation and wellness activities by developing the region's only adaptive sports program. In 16 years, Turnstone's program has grown to become a Paralympic Sport Club which today serves over 500 people with physical disabilities. But hundreds more, including our veterans and members of the armed forces, could be served if programs were available.

Programs require funding. The funds provided through the Olympic Opportunity Fund are vital to the success of agencies who dedicate themselves to advancing and empowering people with disabilities. The receipt of the Olympic Opportunity Fund will provide Turnstone with the opportunity to bring the Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies program to northeast Indiana. The program will address the exploding, and unmet, demand for recreation, sports, and wellness opportunities for northeast Indiana veterans and members of the armed forces. Through this program health and wellness fitness memberships will be provided to veterans and members of the armed forces with physical disabilities. An introduction to Paralympic sports, as well as inclusive family programming, will be offered to our servicemen and women who participate in the Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies program.

Turnstone will serve 25 veterans through the Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies program in the coming 2011-12 program year. While the VA and Turnstone sought to work together in the past, there was not an avenue to bridge the relationship. The Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies program creates this bridge. As a result of this program, which would not have been possible without the support of the Olympic Opportunity Fund, Turnstone and the VA will have the opportunity to work together. Through our joint efforts linked by the Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies program, veterans with physical disabilities living in northeast Indiana will have access to vital health and wellness programs as well as Paralympic sports. Through the Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies program, our veterans will reclaim their dignity and independence.

Founded in 1943, Turnstone is a not-for-profit health and human services agency with an established history of serving children and adults with disabilities living in northeast Indiana. Turnstone's mission is to provide therapeutic, educational, wellness and recreational programs to empower people with disabilities living in northeast Indiana. In 2009, Turnstone became a designated Paralympic Sport Club.

Current Programs

In 2011, over 2,200 children and adults with disabilities benefit from Turnstone's unique programs and services. Turnstone offers the only wheelchair accessible health and wellness center in Indiana, the only competitive sports and recreation program in northeast Indiana and northwest Ohio, and it is the only organization in the region that provides speech, physical, occupational and aquatic therapy services for children and adults on a sliding fee scale. Other programs and services provided by the agency include a warm water therapeutic pool, early intervention preschool and childcare services, case management, residential ramp building, equipment loan and an adult day services program.

2012 and Beyond

Turnstone's Madge Rothschild Pediatric Therapy Wing will be completed in 2012. The addition of the wing will allow Turnstone to serve the 50 children on the waiting list to receive pediatric therapy services. An additional 100 children in need of therapy services living in northeast Indiana will also benefit from this expansion.

In 2012, more than 600 children with disabilities will receive speech, physical, occupational and aquatic therapy on a sliding fee scale at Turnstone.

Turnstone will continue to address the exploding, and unmet, demand for therapy, recreation, sports and wellness opportunities for people with disabilities in the coming years. The agency will soon embark on the early stages of a silent \$8 million capital campaign, which is scheduled for completion in 2014. Turnstone will become the Midwest's stage for innovation in the development of therapeutic and wellness programs, including Paralympic sports, for people with physical disabilities. The 2014 Turnstone will feature: an accessible fitness center, warm water, zero depth therapy pool, as well as a cool water pool and specialized fitness, recreation, aquatics and wheelchair sports programs.

Paralympic Sports

Since becoming a Paralympic Sport Club, Turnstone has introduced new competitive and leisure sports to children and adults with physical disabilities living in northeast Indiana. This designation has also increased the agency's access to resources and experts in the field of Paralympic sports, thereby providing the agency with the ability to build its existing sport programs. Programs which were in place in 2009, but that have been enhanced thanks to becoming a PSC include: basketball, tennis, sled hockey, cycling and fencing. Since 2009, Turnstone has established a boccia team and held several introductory Paralympic sport clinics, including table tennis, archery, softball, curling, fencing, rugby, kayaking and sit volleyball.

Olympic Opportunity Fund

As a Paralympic Sport Club, Turnstone has also been afforded a vital link to new funding sources, including the Olympic Opportunity Grant. In 2011, Turnstone applied and received an Olympic Opportunity Grant to replicate the Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies program in northeast Indiana. This program, which was piloted in the Chicago region, will provide veterans with physical disabilities and post-traumatic stress disorder with access to Turnstone's accessible health and wellness center and an introduction to Paralympic sports.

Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies Program

Turnstone's development of the Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies program will create new possibilities for veterans and members of the armed forces living with physical disabilities. Turnstone could not have brought the program to its community without the support provided through the Olympic Opportunity Fund. These dollars are vital to the development of the program and will have a lasting impact on our veterans. The veterans of northeast Indiana need the Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies program. Veterans like Tim, are the reason the program is so needed.

In early 2011, Tim was featured in the local paper for a project—"Operation Thank You"—he created as a student of Indiana Purdue University of Fort Wayne. Through Operation Thank You, Tim gathered and delivered thank you cards to veterans in the hospital.

Tim, age 25, uses a wheelchair as a result of an injury obtained while in the military. He had heard about Turnstone, but never investigated what the agency offered. Tim toured the agency, learned that it offered wheelchair basketball, and immediately an interest was sparked.

Then he saw the fitness center. Since May, Leonard has been working out at Turnstone. At Turnstone he doesn't have to get out of his chair to work out; he can roll up and lift independently. His focus—weightlifting, and the results are in. He has lost more than 60 pounds of fat; but, gained 30 pounds of muscle. His waistline has shrunk 7", while his chest has increased 10". Tim is a machine.

In August, Tim, who was joined by Turnstone's Director of Adult Services, Tina Acosta and the agency's Sports and Recreation Coordinator, Kevin Hughes, participated in the Valor Midwest Games in Chicago. He took part in the weightlifting competition and took gold. He also competed in the shot put—he took silver.

This September, Tim rolled 4 miles in Fort Wayne's Fort-4-Fitness Half Marathon 10K and 4 Mile event. This event drew over 9,500 athletes. Tim completed the 4 mile race in 50 minutes. Tim wheeled the race with a 14-year old boy with cerebral palsy. The young man completed the race 13 seconds faster than Tim. Both Tim and the boy were winners that day. Tim says, "Where there is a way, there is how". He's found the way and the how at Turnstone.

Tim's story is one of success. More successes are possible. More possibilities can be created. The Olympic Opportunity Fund creates possibilities.

Charlie Huebner, USOC's Chief of Paralympics stated in USA Today, "The most important thing that we can do, and our partners do, is make sure there's programming available for when young men and women returning to their community because that's where the rehab process really takes hold." Colonel Barbara Springer, former chief of physical therapy at Walter Reed, witnessed the impact of recreational programs on wounded warriors.

Colonel Springer states "Once they see they can do that activity, then they have the confidence, the self-esteem, to try anything". Huebner and Springer's words reinforce the need for Turnstone's Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies program, as well as the Olympic Opportunity Fund.

According to the VA of Northern Indiana, there are 7,000 veterans from OIF, OEF and OND living in northeast Indiana, while the local DAV chapters in the region have a cumulative membership of over 2,500. Nationally the VA reports, 77 percent of Veterans are overweight or obese, and weight-related disorders, including diabetes, are common.

Turnstone has the resources and expertise needed to help our Veterans and members of the Armed Forces get fit, become active in sports and recreation and regain their independence. Turnstone's Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies program will expand Paralympic sports and physical activity programs for Veterans and members of the Armed Forces with physical disabilities and their caregivers.

The Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies program will include four components:

- 6-month membership to Turnstone's accessible fitness center and warm water pool as well as 5 hours of personal training.
- Access to Paralympic sports, including wheelchair tennis, bocchia, sled hockey, wheelchair basketball, rugby and snow skiing and more.
- A monthly family social event, focusing on health and the introduction of Paralympic sports.
- Establishment of a Veterans Services Advisory Committee to ensure program sustainability.

It is projected that 25 Veterans or members of the Armed Forces with physical disabilities (including amputations, spinal cord injuries, visual impairment, post-traumatic stress disorder, cerebral palsy, stroke and traumatic brain injury, age 21 to 55, in addition to 20-25 caregivers of similar age), will participate in the Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies program.

Through the Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies program Turnstone is investing in the long term health, wellness and quality of life of veterans living with disabilities in northeast Indiana, a group whose needs are underserved and unfilled. Our veterans are competent, self-determined individuals who can, and should, live with the independence and dignity they had before disability entered their life.

Veterans deserve to live the lives of their dreams with full inclusion in all areas of life: educational, social, employment, and recreational. Without the availability of the Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies program, northeast Indiana will lack the specialized programs and facilities that enable full participation of people with a myriad of disabilities. The infusion of support provided by the Olympic Opportunity Fund to Turnstone changes that.

Conclusion

"Champions aren't made in the gyms. Champions are made from something they have deep inside them—a desire, a dream, a vision."—Muhammad Ali

The participants of the Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies program are champions. They are our veterans who had a desire and dream to protect our nation—to protect our freedom and our independence. While championing their beliefs, these veterans lost their independence. Their life was changed in an instant, and they are now living with a disability. They should be thriving; their disability should not define their life or their livelihood.

The Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies program, which is made possible thanks to the Olympic Opportunity Fund, redefines veterans living with disabilities. It offers hope; it changes lives. Through this program, veterans with physical disabilities will rebuild their physical strength, mental wellness and confidence. They will regain their dignity. They will rediscover their joy.

Past Federal Support

Turnstone received a 3-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education in the amount of \$130,000 in 2009. This grant funded the ICAAN (Inclusive Community

Athletics and Activities Now) Program, which introduced various inclusive sports and recreation programs for persons with physical disabilities and their peers.

Turnstone received the Carol M. White Award through the U.S. Department of Education in the amount of \$120,000 in 2002. This grant funded Turnstone's Fitness for EveryBODY program and was instrumental in the agency's development of its accessible health and wellness fitness program and center.

**Prepared Statement of Kirk M. Bauer, J.D., USA (Ret.),
Executive Director, Disabled Sports USA**

Executive Summary

The VA funded Paralympic Sports has provided unparalleled opportunities for Disabled Sports USA (DSUSA), working in partnership with U.S. Paralympics, to provide health enhancing sports and physical activity programs for severely wounded servicemembers, all at no cost to the disabled veteran. Just this past year, it has enabled Disabled Sports USA to identify and serve over 1000 severely wounded, including those with single and multiple amputations, paralysis, visual impairments and traumatic brain injury. Many of these are suffering some degree of Post Traumatic Stress and have found that participation in sports helps them to deal with PTSD more positively.

The funding provided by the VA program has enabled DSUSA to "leverage" its resources, drawing upon the community chapters' commitments of local resources, and encouraging corporate and individual donations to supplement the VA funding. Over \$3 of funds were raised by Disabled Sports USA in the private sector, to every dollar provided by the VA grant funding.

In the fiscal year October 1 to September 30, 2011, Disabled Sports USA has provided over 130 teaching and competition programs in over 20 sports, for over 1000 disabled veterans nationwide. This has included instruction and advanced courses in the winter sports of alpine and Nordic Skiing, snowboarding, Biathlon and sled hockey.

It has also included adaptive cycling, running and wheeling, equestrian, golfing, shooting, archery, sailing, kayaking, rowing, outrigger canoeing, swimming, scuba, fishing, water skiing, river rafting, climbing, hiking and other sports.

One veteran with TBI, who is now training to become a Paralympic Ski Racer, reported that he was able to reduce his medications from 15 per day to 3 per day because of his commitment to training and becoming physically fit.

Another, a National Guard Non Commissioned Officer with TBI, learned to ski and now has committed to become a certified Adaptive Ski Instructor to help a local New York Chapter of DSUSA. He has also become involved in helping to staff youth camps conducted by the chapter, for children with disabilities. He reported at one camp this summer that he became so involved in helping the kids; he forgot his "alive day", which had always caused him to become depressed and despondent as he dealt with PTSD. His therapists remarked that this was a major breakthrough for the veteran.

These programs have produced positive outcomes for hundreds of disabled veterans who are struggling with readjustment to their new physical and mental challenges.

Testimony

The VA funded Paralympic Sports has provided unparalleled opportunities for Disabled Sports USA (DSUSA), working in partnership with U.S. Paralympics, to provide health enhancing sports and physical activity programs for severely wounded servicemembers, all at no cost to the disabled veteran. Just this past year, it has enabled Disabled Sports USA to identify and serve over 1000 severely wounded, including those with single and multiple amputations, paralysis, visual impairments and traumatic brain injury. Many of these are suffering some degree of Post Traumatic Stress and have found that participation in sports helps them to deal with PTSD more positively.

It also has provided the opportunity for DSUSA to develop partnerships with 63 community based DSUSA chapters and Paralympic Sports Clubs in 32 states; to help implement health enhancing sports programs at the community level. The funding provided by the VA program has enabled DSUSA to "leverage" its resources, drawing upon the community chapters' commitments of local resources, and encouraging corporate and individual donations to supplement the VA funding. Over

\$3 of funds were raised by Disabled Sports USA in the private sector, to every dollar provided by the VA grant funding.

Our chapters were so impressed with the programs provided through U.S.Paralympics, that 39 of our 104 chapters have now become Paralympic Sports Clubs; spreading the excitement of Paralympic Sport and the benefits of physical activity for successful rehabilitation and reintegration back to an active, social life. Finally, VA funding has enabled DSUSA to leverage its private sector funding to provide additional sports services that increase health and wellness and provide increased opportunities for participation in Paralympic sport training and competition programs.

In the fiscal year October 1 to September 30, 2011, Disabled Sports USA has provided over 130 teaching and competition programs in over 20 sports, for over 1000 disabled veterans nationwide. This has included instruction and advanced courses in the winter sports of alpine and Nordic Skiing, snowboarding, Biathlon and sled hockey.

It has also included adaptive cycling, running and wheeling, equestrian, golfing, shooting, archery, sailing, kayaking, rowing, outrigger canoeing, swimming, scuba, fishing, water skiing, river rafting, climbing, hiking and other sports.

Through the VA Paralympic program, as well as private sector funding, DSUSA was able to expand training and racing opportunities in winter sports to disabled veterans, providing increased opportunities to achieve excellence in sports and train for possible Paralympic participation. This included 8 ski race (intermediate-advanced) training camps; 11 multi-level ski and snowboard training camps (beginner-intermediate); 11 ongoing, community programs (offering multiple participation opportunities, season long); grants to veterans pursuing adaptive instructor certification; and four regional "NorAm" elite races which included Paralympic level competitors from Europe, Australia and Canada.

Because of the partnership with U.S.Paralympics and the VA, DSUSA is now working with more than 30 local VA Medical Centers on identification, outreach and recruitment of disabled veterans to its physical activity and sports programs. See appendix B for list of facilities.

DSUSA is also working with more than 17 Military Medical Centers and Warrior Transition Units at major military bases on identification, outreach and recruitment of severely wounded warriors to its physical activity and sports programs. See appendix B for list of facilities.

These programs have produced positive outcomes for hundreds of disabled veterans who are struggling with readjustment to their new physical and mental challenges. One veteran with TBI, who is now training to become a Paralympic Ski Racer, reported that he was able to reduce his medications from 15 per day to 3 per day because of his commitment to training and becoming physically fit.

Another, a National Guard Non Commissioned Officer with TBI, learned to ski and now has committed to become a certified Adaptive Ski Instructor to help a local New York Chapter of DSUSA. He has also become involved in helping to staff youth camps conducted by the chapter, for children with disabilities. He reported at one camp this summer that he became so involved in helping the kids; he forgot his "alive day", which had always caused him to become depressed and despondent as he dealt with PTSD. His therapists remarked that this was a major breakthrough for the veteran.

Another Chicago based disabled veteran, an Air Force Senior Airman demolition expert was seriously injured when an IED in Iraq he was attempting to diffuse exploded. He lost his arm, and had the skin on his legs literally blown off so he had to be treated like a burn victim and suffered extensive muscle and bone damage. He became involved in the golf, scuba and skiing programs offered by DSUSA and has now become a single digit handicapped golfer. Just this last month, in August, he was offered a job with one of DSUSA's sponsors, AON, to help with their crisis management program for U.S.corporations located in foreign lands.

An Army Captain with TBI from an IED just finished competing in the Hood to Coast Relay, a 12 man team that runs 197 miles from the top of Mt. Hood to the Oregon Coast. DSUSA entered the only wounded warrior team in the race which involved over 1,200 teams with nearly 15,000 runners. That veteran, who was encouraged by DSUSA Chapter Team River Runner, to become involved in kayaking in the hospital; is now teaching kayaking and helping DSUSA start a new chapter in Portland, Oregon.

DSUSA is now surveying veterans participating in the Paralympic Sport programs offered through the VA funding. Initial survey results are showing that the veterans are now more active, committed to a healthier lifestyle and coping with their disabilities better, because of their involvement in sports and physical activity.

Finally, because DSUSA is able to promote the VA sponsored Paralympic Sports Program on its Web site, in its national magazine *Challenge*, and with its network of 104 chapters operating in 38 states; thousands of readers and supporters are becoming aware of the Paralympic Sports Program and of its positive, health enhancing benefits to disabled veterans. Disabled Sports USA has provided several veteran success stories for use on the new VA Paralympic Web site.

In addition, because of agreements with participating DSUSA chapters to market the program, more veterans are learning about the benefits of sports and physical activity through local chapter outreach efforts.

In summary, the VA funded Paralympic Sport Program for disabled veterans has been an outstanding success to date. More disabled veterans are getting involved in the sports programs from entry level to elite Paralympic levels. They are benefiting through increased physical activity and are reporting that they are fitter, more active and better adjusted to civilian life because of the sports opportunities provided to them.

With the newly injured returning from Afghanistan, the need for these programs is more urgent than ever before. Because the troops are being forced to dismount their armored vehicles in the highlands of Afghanistan, the military is reporting an alarming increase in the number of single and multiple amputees getting injured by IEDs, mortars and gunfire while dismounted.

DSUSA staff has been witnessing firsthand this resurgence for several months; and now *USA Today* is reporting a doubling of the amputee injured from recent previous years and a tripling of the number returning with multiple amputations. These deserving wounded warriors will need our help as they separate from the military and become disabled veterans. With the help of the VA, DSUSA will continue to be there for them.

Appendix A

Testimonials

“I had the time of my life and learned something I thought I would not learn very easy. I am looking forward to participating in more upcoming events. My wife Amanda loved the trip also and was happy to make new friends with spouses that deal with the same issues as herself with me. You all have helped me cope even better with my disabilities and raise my self-esteem.”

Army SSGT Olan W. Aldrich
Wounded Warrior, Traumatic Brain Injury

“You get injured like this, you tell yourself you’ll be OK, but deep inside you know there are limits. But doing something like this, you realize there aren’t as many as you think, if you put your mind to it.”

Marine LCPL Ufrano Rios Jimenez
Wounded Warrior, Leg Amputee

“I wanted to touch base with you to thank you for an awesome opportunity with The Hartford Ski Spectacular. I personally was mesmerized by the organization and the overwhelming support provided to me and my patients. My patients were glowing by the time they returned to FL. Laurie and Jimmy progressed to higher functioning adaptive ski equipment. Dustin was “stoked” that he can ski again, as he was a snowboarder prior to his injury. Please let everyone know that we greatly appreciated this program and it was an honor to have been a part of such a wonderful program.”

Tammi Pasquel, Certified Therapeutic
Recreation Specialist & Brain Injury Specialist
Tampa VA

“Pushing myself to the limits, knowing that I can accomplish anything regardless of my injuries is what the ski weekend represents. I’ve done a lot of things that I never did when I was healthy and definitely didn’t think I could do when I got injured.”

Army SPC Mike Green
Wounded Warrior, Above Elbow Amputee

“We all found ways to grow and push ourselves on the Grand Canyon. It gave us a look inside ourselves and gave us all the courage to say—as my friends at Disabled Sports USA say “if I can do this, I can do anything”. You have started a new

adventure and nothing, not a stroke, not the loss of a limb, not the loss of sight, nor PTSD or TBI will stop you from enjoying life.”

**Army CAPT Chip Sell
Wounded Warrior, Traumatic Brain Injury**

“I have observed firsthand how Disabled Sports USA’s Wounded Warrior Disabled Sports Project offers safe, reliable and effective programs for the severely wounded servicemembers who undergo treatment here. Your programming is always top-notch and provides high quality adaptive instruction. Participation in recreation and sports has been a key element in the successful rehabilitation of our population.”

**Rebecca Hooper, PhD Program Manager
Center for the Intrepid**

To All The People That Believe In Me.

I want to thank all these programs for helping me lose weight. I used to weigh 275 lbs and now I’m down to 245 lbs. and going down. All because I have been given a chance to be active as a disabled person. Wounded Warrior Project, DSUSA, AbilityPLUS, Central Jersey Rifle & Pistol Club, New Jersey Quail Project, Bart J Ruggiere Adaptive Sports Center, Challenge Aspen, New England Disabled Sports, Wheelers for the Wounded, Adaptive Sports Foundation. I want to give a very special thank you to all the volunteer and supporters without you we wouldn’t have these program. God Bless You All.

**Army SSG. Heriberto Vidró
Wounded Warrior, Traumatic Brain Injury**

Appendix B

List of VA Medical Centers

| | | |
|------------------|--|---|
| Tampa (FL) | Saginaw (MI) | San Diego (CA) |
| Palo Alto (CA) | Johnstown (PA) | Jewell VA Outpatient Rehabilitation Center (CO) |
| Richmond (VA) | Missouri (MO) | Stratton (NY) |
| Washington (DC) | Hines (IL) | Salt Lake (UT) |
| Northport (NY) | Boston (MA) | Johnson City (TN) |
| Los Angeles (CA) | Martinsburg (VA) | Asheville (NC) |
| Seattle (WA) | Eastern Blind Rehabilitation Center (CT) | Phoenix (AZ) |
| Albany (NY) | Puget Sound Health care System (WA) | Tucson (AZ) |
| Syracuse (NY) | America Lake (WA) | Prescott (AZ) |
| Western (NY) | Togus (ME) | Cheyenne (CO) |
| Hampton (VA) | Clement J Zeblocki (WI) | Baltimore (MD) |

List of Warrior Transition Units and Military Medical Centers

| | | |
|---|--------------------|--|
| Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (MD) | Fort Belvoir (VA) | Fort Drum (NY) |
| Naval Medical Center San Diego (CA) | Fort Sam (TX) | 29 Palms (CA) |
| Brooke Army Medical Center (TX) | Walter Reed (DC) | U.S. Marine Corp Wounded Warrior Battalion East (Lejeune NC) |
| Fort Carson (CO) | Fort Eustis (VA) | U.S. Marine Corp Wounded Warrior Battalion West (Pendleton CA) |
| Fort Bragg (NC) | Fort Lewis (WA) | U.S. Marine Corp Wounded Warrior Battalion HQ (Quantico VA) |
| Fort Meade (VA) | Fort Campbell (KY) | Wounded Warrior Detachment (HI) |

Appendix C**List of participating (partner) organizations (*denotes DSUSA chapter and Paralympic Sports Club)**

Ability Plus*
 Adaptive Action Sports
 Adaptive Adventures*
 Adaptive Sports Center, Crested Butte*
 Adaptive Sports Foundation*
 Arizona Disabled Sports*
 Bart J. Ruggiere Adaptive Sports Center*
 Blue Ridge Adaptive Snow Sports
 Breckenridge Outdoor Education Center*
 Bridge II Sports*
 Cape Ability Outrigger Ohana, Inc.*
 Challenge Alaska*
 Challenge Aspen*
 Challenged Athletes of West Virginia
 Colorado Discover Ability
 Common Ground Outdoor Adventures
 Disabled Sports Eastern Sierra*
 Disabled Sports USA Far West*
 Eagle Mount Bozeman
 Friends of Stowe
 Great Lakes Adaptive Sports Association*
 Greek Peak Adaptive Snowsports
 Lakeshore Foundation*
 Leaps of Faith Disabled Water Skiers
 Maine Handicapped Skiing*
 National Ability Center*
 National Sports Center for the Disabled*
 New England Disabled Sports*
 New England Handicapped sports Association*
 Northeast Passage*
 Operation Comfort
 Oregon Adaptive Sports
 Outdoors For All*
 San Diego Adaptive Sports Foundation*
 SouthEastern Wisconsin Adaptive Ski Program
 Sports Association, Gaylord Hospital
 Sports, Arts, and Recreation of Chattanooga
 STRIDE Adaptive Sports*
 SUDS Diving, Inc.
 Sun Valley Adaptive Sports Program Inc
 Team River Runner
 Telluride Adaptive Sports Program*
 Teton Adaptive Sports
 The Adaptive Adventure Sports Coalition
 Two Top Mountain Adaptive Sports Foundation
 U.S. Handcycling
 UCO Sports & Recreation*
 United States Adaptive Recreation Center
 Wheelchair Sports Inc.
 Wintergreen Adaptive Sports

**Prepared Statement of Carl Blake, National
Legislative Director, Paralyzed Veterans of America**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**PVA Sponsors National Veterans' Wheelchair Games**

- 2011 was 26th year PVA has co-hosted with VA
- Held in Pittsburgh, PA
- 567 veterans participated.

- 41 were veterans of (OEF/OIF)
- 126 of the veterans were first-time participants
- Next year will be held in Richmond, VA
- Encourage Subcommittee Members to attend

PVA supported the provisions of Public Law 110-389, the “Veterans’ Benefits Improvement Act of 2008”

- The intent of the law is consistent with the mission of PVA’s Sports and Recreation
- Program which is to expand the quantity and quality of sports and recreation opportunities, especially those that promote lifetime fitness and a healthy lifestyle, for PVA members and other people with disabilities.
- Law promotes disabled sports from the local level through elite levels.
- Creates partnerships among organizations specializing in supporting, training, and promoting programs for disabled veterans

PVA has benefited directly from Paralympics support

- Received \$400,000 in December 2010
- Funded activities for 805 unique disabled veterans; 4,261 participation opportunities
- PVA Handcycling Program (\$175,000); National Veterans Wheelchair Games \$125,000);
- PVA National Trapshoot Circuit (\$50,000); PVA/AWBA Bowling Tournament Series (\$50,000)

Much progress and enhanced cooperation has resulted from the Paralympics Program and its partnership with VA

- Disabled sports and recreation activities have a positive impact not only on disabled servicemembers and veterans, but on their families as well
- Enhances self-esteem, reduces stress and the incidence of secondary medical conditions, and obviously improves conditioning
- Allows disabled servicemembers and veterans to reengage with family, friends, and the community
- PVA has transitioned a number of severely disabled veterans from our sports and recreation programs into our Vocational Rehabilitation program

Recommendations

- Transparency for credibility
- USOC-Paralympics should implement a review committee that consists of leaders from the adapted sports and recreation community who administer programs for disabled veterans
- Congress complete appropriations; hindering administration of program

Chairman Stutzman, Ranking Member Braley, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to be here today on behalf of Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) to offer our views on the partnership between the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) Paralympics program. As we have testified in the past, treatment and rehabilitation through sports and recreation for severely injured servicemembers and veterans is an important part of returning these men and women to a normal life. We would like to thank this Subcommittee particularly for its efforts to expand sports and recreation opportunities for disabled servicemembers and veterans.

Perhaps no veterans’ service organization understands the importance of sports as a rehabilitation tool more than PVA. Since its inception in 1946, PVA has recognized the important role that sports and recreation play in the spinal cord injury (SCI) rehabilitation process. In fact, it was paralyzed veterans, injured during World War II, who first started playing pick-up games of wheelchair basketball in VA hospitals. This marked the birth of wheelchair sports. Doctors quickly realized the significance of these types of activities and the powerful therapeutic benefits on the physical, mental and social state that could be derived from participating in wheelchair sports. It is for this reason that PVA developed, and annually administers, a

comprehensive sports and recreation program for its members and other Americans with disabilities.

PVA sponsors a wide array of sports and outdoor recreation events to improve the quality of life and health of veterans with severe disabilities. Most notable of these activities is the National Veterans Wheelchair Games (NVWG) which PVA has co-sponsored with the Department of Veterans Affairs for 26 years. In fact the most recent Games just wrapped up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in July. This year, the NVWG drew 567 veterans. Of that number, 41 were veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF). More importantly, 126 of the veterans were first-time participants. PVA has one of the highest participation rates of members in this event. Next summer, PVA, along with the VA, will host the NVWG in Richmond, Virginia—site of the very first Wheelchair Games. We would encourage the Subcommittee to consider a day trip (or longer) to observe this incredible event firsthand. Likewise, we fully support the activities of the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, the National Veterans Golden Age Games, and the National Creative Arts Festival.

In recent years, PVA has conducted significant outreach at Department of Defense (DoD) and VA hospitals to make its sports and recreation programs available to recently injured Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) veterans, and now to veterans of Operation New Dawn. In fact, PVA was recognized in 2007 by the staff at Walter Reed Army Medical Center for our important work with the men and women being treated at that facility. In addition, in 2008 PVA edited a chapter in the DoD medical handbook *Care of the Combat Amputee* entitled “Sports and Recreation Opportunities for the Combat Amputee” to be included.

PVA was pleased to support the provisions of Public Law 110–389, the “Veterans’ Benefits Improvement Act of 2008.” Section 7 of the law authorized the VA to provide assistance to the Military Paralympics Program and expand sports and recreation opportunities available to severely disabled veterans. The intent of the law is consistent with the mission of PVA’s Sports and Recreation Program which is to expand the quantity and quality of sports and recreation opportunities, especially those that promote lifetime fitness and a healthy lifestyle, for PVA members and other people with disabilities. As we have testified in the past, PVA’s primary goal for its Sports and Recreation Program is all about health care and rehabilitation first.

P.L. 110–389 specifically emphasizes the need to enhance the recreation activities provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs by promoting disabled sports from the local level through elite levels and by creating partnerships among organizations specializing in supporting, training, and promoting programs for disabled veterans. This will be accomplished by providing training, technical assistance and equipment and Paralympics mentors for injured veterans to participate in daily physical activity at the community level as an aspect of their rehabilitation.

PVA has been fortunate to benefit directly from the expansion of activities under the USOC–Paralympics program. PVA was a grant recipient of one of the first round of grants provided by the USOC. In December 2010, PVA received a \$400,000 grant of financial support from the USOC for the U.S. Paralympics Integrated Adaptive Sports Program. This funding was intended to cover program support activities through June 2011, when the next round of grants would be disbursed.

With the financial support of the Paralympics, PVA was able to provide sports and recreation opportunities to 805 unique disabled veterans. Ultimately, 4,261 participation opportunities were made available to disabled veterans. PVA allocated the grant funding in the following manner:

- PVA Handcycling Program (\$175,000)
- National Veterans Wheelchair Games (\$125,000)
- PVA National Trapshoot Circuit (\$50,000)
- PVA/AWBA Bowling Tournament Series (\$50,000)

Funding dedicated towards the Handcycling Program allowed us to move plans forward from preliminary stages and create 3,371 affiliated recreational, competitive, and training participation opportunities. A total of 83 unique disabled veterans took part in the program. We were able to host four regional adaptive cycling clinics in the following cities: Seattle, Washington; Palo Alto, California; Tampa, Florida; and Boston, Massachusetts. The Paralympics grant was also used to fund Paralyzed Veterans Racing team members who participated in the United States Handcycling Federation racing series nationwide.

Support provided to the National Veterans Wheelchair Games provided an excellent opportunity for the Paralympics to conduct outreach as a part of its recruitment efforts for the 2012 London Olympic Games. We were able to introduce events simi-

lar to those found at the Paralympics at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, which identified veterans with the potential to be future Paralympics-level athletes.

PVA was also pleased to provide funding from the Paralympics grant for shooting sports as a part of our National Trapshoot Circuit. The grant supported a total of 77 unique disabled veterans who participated in 187 participation opportunities. We successfully hosted 15 trapshoot tournaments throughout the United States. These tournaments introduced disabled veterans to the sport of trapshooting by providing certified instructors and equipment for the disabled veterans attending the events. Additionally, we were able to develop and administer secondary shooting events, including rifle, pistol, air rifle and air pistol that are held concurrently alongside the trapshoot tournaments. These events are tailored to resemble shooting sports events that Paralympics athletes also participate in during competition. As a result of this financial support from the Paralympics, next year PVA will implement an air rifle and air pistol program consisting of four regional tournaments to be held throughout the United States.

Finally, PVA was pleased to partner with the American Wheelchair Bowling Association (AWBA), with the backing of the USOC-Paralympics, to conduct the Bowling Tournament Series. This series hosted a total of 62 unique disabled veterans representing 120 total participation opportunities. PVA and the AWBA successfully hosted eight bowling tournaments throughout the United States. Recently, the 50th American Wheelchair Bowling Association's National Tournament was held in Brockton, Massachusetts as part of the New England PVA Tournament.

We believe that much progress and enhanced cooperation has resulted from the Paralympics Program and its partnership with VA. Under this program, PVA has witnessed improved coordination between our organization, USOC-Paralympics, and other veterans' and community-based sports organizations that has enhanced existing programs and advanced development of new programs in communities that previously had not been served. The overall performance of the partnership between PVA, the USOC-Paralympics and the Department of Veterans Affairs has successfully produced an increased number of sports and recreation opportunities for disabled veterans.

There is no doubt that activities such as those listed above and all disabled sports and recreation activities have a positive impact not only on disabled servicemembers and veterans, but on their families as well. Research shows that physical activity is an important aspect of the rehabilitation process for persons with disabilities. It enhances self-esteem, reduces stress and the incidence of secondary medical conditions, and obviously improves conditioning. Equally important is that sports and recreation rehabilitation allows disabled servicemembers and veterans to reengage with family, friends, and the community. This contributes to a greater level of success in education and employment. In fact, PVA has transitioned a number of severely disabled veterans from our sports and recreation programs into our Vocational Rehabilitation program. As those veterans became healthier and more confident, they realized that they would not be satisfied without becoming fully productive members of society once again.

In the past, we offered several recommendations that we believed would expand veteran participation in programs administered by the VA and the Paralympics program. While we believe that the Paralympics program has helped alleviate some of these concerns, our principal recommendation to remove barriers to participation remains the same. Our concern is that newly injured veterans should be provided timely access to education and training regarding sports and recreation opportunities. We believe that the VA and DoD should continue to improve coordination of outreach efforts between legitimate organizations promoting sports and recreation opportunities and newly injured veterans. As participation continues to improve, we look forward to continued progress as a result of this program.

With regard to the USOC-Paralympics program specifically, both the transparency and credibility of the process to award grants must be improved. We are pleased to see that the USOC-Paralympics recently provided an open accounting of how it has administered its funds. However, we believe the USOC-Paralympics should implement a review committee that consists of leaders from the adapted sports and recreation community who administer programs for disabled veterans. The Committee would be responsible for ensuring that funds are awarded appropriately, efficiently administered, and used as intended. Increased transparency will only instill greater confidence in the success of the program.

Finally, we have some concern about the timeliness and efficiency of funding the USOC-Paralympics program. In order for the organization to disburse funding to grant recipients, the USOC-Paralympics program must receive Federal funding in a timely manner. VA has been slow to provide the necessary funding authorized by the original legislation to USOC-Paralympics. The ability of the USOC-Paralympics

to plan and administer the grants it provides is hindered by the inability of Congress to complete work on the appropriations for VA. As we understand it, funding for this grant program is directed through the Secretary's office through the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs. In other words, until the FY 2012 VA appropriations bill is finally completed, funding for this program will be placed on hold. It truly is a shame that the success of this program hinges on the ability of Congress to fulfill one of its most important responsibilities. Moreover, we must emphasize that the importance of this program should preclude it from having its funding reduced as a part of deficit reduction.

PVA appreciates the focus being placed on these important programs. We look forward to working with this Subcommittee to ensure that a wide range of sports and recreation activities are available to the men and women who have served and sacrificed.

I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have.

**Prepared Statement of Charles Huebner,
Chief of U.S. Paralympics, U.S Olympic Committee**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We accepted the responsibility and opportunity to serve those that have served us and because of your leadership in developing and providing funding for this USOC and VA partnership, we are here today to report the following outcomes in the past 10 months:

- The VA and USOC have distributed more 70 grants and provided ongoing training and technical assistance resulting in more than \$5.9m in support.
- These grant organizations are contributing more than \$40.0m in private resources and programmatic support.
 - More than 200 Paralympic Sport Clubs or community sport organizations are currently providing programs for Veterans or servicemembers.
- More than 850 community, sport, military and Veteran leaders have been provided training, technical assistance or ongoing program support to develop or expand existing programs for Veterans.
- More than 14,000 Veterans with disabilities participated in programs and activities since the program's inception, with an emphasis on programming at the community level.

Our focus moving forward are as follows:

- Provide \$7.5m in grants, training and programmatic support, including grants to more than 100 organizations.
- Implement the inaugural VA-U.S.O.C Paralympic Adaptive Sport Training Conference with more than 50 VA therapeutic recreation coordinators participating in February 2012, at the U.S. Olympic Training Center.
- Reduce year one programmatic staff and reinvest those resources into program needs to Veteran and community organizations implementing sport at the local level for Veterans in 2011 and 2012.
- Enhance educational materials and awareness of the impact and importance of physical activity for Veterans at the national and local level.
- Pursue additional resources to support VA-U.S.O.C regional coordinators that can enhance collaboration and impact of programs in targeted regions throughout the U.S. Projected need for eight regional coordinators and program budget is estimated at \$2.488m.

Good morning Chairman Stutzman and Ranking Member Braley, and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Charlie Huebner and I am the Chief of Paralympics, for the United States Olympic Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on progress of the Department of Veteran Affairs, U.S. Olympic Committee and U.S. Paralympics partnership.

By way of a brief background, the USOC is an organization chartered by Congress and one of only four National Olympic Committees that manage both Olympic and Paralympic sport. We are one of only a handful of National Olympic Committees that are 100 percent privately funded, with our major competitors outspending us

often as much as 5-to-1. Paralympic programs are sports for physically disabled athletes. The Paralympic Movement began shortly after World War II utilizing sports as a form of rehabilitation for injured military personnel returning from combat. In 2012 the Paralympic Games return to Great Britain, where with significant involvement from U.S. and U.K. Veterans, the movement was founded.

Injured military personnel and Veterans are the soul of the Paralympic movement. And when I speak of the Paralympic movement, I am not just talking about a small number of elite athletes that will make future Paralympic teams, I am speaking of the growing programs in the U.S. led by the USOC and our partners like PVA, DSUSA and USA Shooting that allow Veterans with physical disabilities an opportunity to re-engage in life by simply skiing with their buddies or playing in the backyard with their kids. As programming expands daily, we see a population that has lower secondary medical conditions, higher self-esteem, lower stress levels and higher achievement levels in education and employment. Research proves that! More importantly, we see a population that inspires all Americans to pursue excellence, in sports and in life.

A few years ago this Committee, Congressional leaders and Veteran and Military organizations asked the USOC to lead this effort, due to our powerful and inspiring brand; our expertise in physical activity and sport for persons with disabilities; and our significant infrastructure of member organizations such as Parks and Recreation, YMCA and USA Hockey, organizations that touch communities all over the U.S., that allow for financial and programmatic efficiencies. We accepted the responsibility and opportunity to serve those that have served us and because of your leadership in developing and providing funding for this USOC and VA partnership, we are here today to report the following outcomes in the past 10 months:

- The VA and USOC have distributed more 70 grants and provided ongoing training and technical assistance resulting in more than \$5.9m in support.
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- More than 200 Paralympic Sport Clubs or community sport organizations are currently providing programs for Veterans or servicemembers.
- More than 850 community, sport, military and Veteran leaders have been provided training, technical assistance or ongoing program support to develop or expand existing programs for Veterans.
- More than 14,000 Veterans with disabilities participated in programs and activities since the program's inception, with an emphasis on programming at the community level.

Thanks to the leadership of this Committee, Secretary Eric Shinseki, Executive Director of Intergovernmental Affairs Mike Galloucis, VA Paralympic Director Chris Nowak, and VA Paralympic team member Matt Bristol, all Veterans, we have completed the planning phases for 2011 and beyond with an emphasis on expanded services, greater efficiencies and significant impact on those that we owe so much.

Our focus moving forward are as follows:

- Provide \$7.5m in grants, training and programmatic support, including grants to more than 100 organizations.
- Implement the inaugural VA-U.S.O.C Paralympic Adaptive Sport Training Conference with more than 50 VA therapeutic recreation coordinators participating in February 2012, at the U.S. Olympic Training Center.
- Reduce year one programmatic staff and reinvest those resources into program needs to Veteran and community organizations implementing sport at the local level for Veterans in 2011 and 2012.
- Enhance educational materials and awareness of the impact and importance of physical activity for Veterans at the national and local level.
- Pursue additional resources to support VA-U.S.O.C regional coordinators that can enhance collaboration and impact of programs in targeted regions throughout the U.S. Projected need for eight regional coordinators and program budget is estimated at \$2.488m.

In closing, I'd like to highlight one program that aligns all of our strategies, collaboration, training, technical assistance, awareness and financial support, along with an emphasis on hiring Veterans.

Joe Brown was from Arizona. His family has a strong military history. His grandfather died as a POW during the Korean War. His father was an Air Force fighter pilot. Joe played football at the Ohio State University and 3 years in the NFL. But the Army Rangers were continually a calling, so he joined the Army, the Rangers and deployed to Iraq in 2004 and again in 2007.

During his 2007 tour he was calling in air strikes atop a three-story building, trying to help a unit in trouble. As his unit was leaving the building, Brown fell down a 30-foot shaft, suffering a severe brain injury.

Brown new the importance of physical activity and sport in the rehabilitation process. He attended the USOC VA Paralympic Leadership Conference to gain valuable training and connect with other organizations and agencies in his region. He pursued a position in the parks and recreation industry near a military facility so he could serve injured servicemembers and Veterans

He was hired by Harker Heights Parks and Recreation outside of Ft. Hood. Harker Heights, was awarded a \$23,000 USOC-VA grant in 2010. Today more than 80 Veterans are participating consistently in an array of physical activity programs led by Joe.

Harker Heights Hired a Hero! I would like to recognize U.S. Army Veteran Joe Brown.

And again, I would like to thank the Committee, VA leadership and organizational partners with us today for supporting this partnership that is so critical to supporting our Nation's finest.

I am available for any questions.

**Prepared Statement of Christopher Nowak, Director,
Office of National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events,
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Good afternoon Chairman Stutzman, Ranking Member Braley, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am Chris Nowak, Director, Office of National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events, Department of Veterans Affairs. I am honored to be here today to share the success of the partnership between the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the United States Paralympics to promote adaptive sports. I am also a disabled Veteran, and I believe that my personal participation in adaptive sports as part of my rehabilitation provides me with a unique perspective on this very important VA program.

Adaptive sports can be an integral part of a Veteran's rehabilitation from traumatic injury, illness or disease. My office is committed to providing Veterans with the opportunity to engage in adaptive sports as part of a comprehensive rehabilitation program based on clinical outcomes. Our partnership with the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) allows us to provide adaptive sporting opportunities year-round in communities where our Veterans live.

The Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-389) authorized the formation of the Office of National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events, which is to be headed by a Director who reports to the Secretary, Deputy Secretary or an appropriate official within the Veterans Benefits Administration. When I joined the team as its first Director in February 2011, the office managed all VA Paralympic-related programs, to include grants, allowances and outreach, and reported to the Secretary as necessary.

On September 22, 2011, the VA's existing office of National Programs and Special Events (NPSE), which managed VA's National Rehabilitation Special Events, was consolidated with the Office of National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events. This consolidation permits more efficient utilization of personnel and increased capacity and flexibility to support VA adaptive sports and art therapy programs at the community and national level. I now oversee VA's Paralympic programs as well as the six rehabilitation special events detailed below. I report to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

The Office of National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events is currently staffed by 19 full time employees. In addition, the team includes a consultant to aid in the consolidation of the National Rehabilitation Special Events and Paralympic programs, and a detailee from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) to provide clinical input to the programs. These staff not only coordinate VA's partnership with the USOC, to include grant awards and oversight, monthly allowance assistance to Veterans and related outreach, but also to plan and to manage VA's National Rehabilitation Special Events: the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, National Veterans Wheelchair Games, National Veterans Golden Age Games, National Veterans TEE (Training, Experience, Exposure) Tournament, National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, and the National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic. Additionally, the office coordinates VA's commemorative event activities, such as the National Veterans Day Observance, and manages VA's participation in the National Memorial Day observance.

The Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act also authorizes VA to seek sponsorships and donations from the private sector to defray cost of carrying out the integrated adaptive sports program. As Director, my focus has been to ensure proper use of VA grant funding, enact the monthly assistance allowance payments, and develop outreach materials. I have also taken steps to establish sponsorship as an objective for 2012. These steps include:

- Establishing a Deputy Director within the office with the capability to develop clinical support for adaptive sports programs. This will allow us to validate the clinical benefits of adaptive sports as a form of rehabilitation.
- Hiring my first staff member who has already established connections with media to aid in distribution of promotional materials related to the program.
- Developing promotional materials that will aid in recruitment of eligible Veterans as well as potential sponsors. These materials include: an adaptive sports brochure, stickers, posters, fact sheet, outreach tool kit, a Web site and Web-based tools.

In fiscal year 2010, VA entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the USOC to provide Paralympic sport programming and additional community support, including funding and resources, to injured servicemembers and Veterans across the country. VA subsequently awarded \$7.5 million to the USOC for the integrated adaptive sports program. VA also published regulations, developed forms and established procedures for awarding the monthly assistance allowance as authorized in Public Law 110-389.

Moving forward in 2012, I expect to see greater coordination within VA as we consolidate the National Rehabilitation Special Events and Paralympic programs while continuing to develop our relationship with the USOC. The overarching objective is to provide disabled Veterans with adaptive sporting opportunities year-round and to ensure that these opportunities are consistent with appropriate clinical guidelines to aid in their rehabilitation.

While VA continues to improve its current National Rehabilitation Special Events program, VA is continuing to look for new ways to enhance the rehabilitation experiences of our Veterans. We are meeting the challenges head on and constantly exploring ways to strengthen our partnership with the USOC. This concludes my statement, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

