

STATEMENT OF
PATRICK D. MURRAY
BEFORE THE
BUDGET COMMITTEE
UNITED STATES SENATE
WITH RESPECT TO

The Impact of Budget Decisions on Families and Communities

WASHINGTON, D.C.

FEBRUARY 13, 2013

Chairman Murray, Ranking Member Sessions, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my experiences and concerns as a retired Marine and a student-veteran.

I grew up in Rhode Island and joined the Marines at nineteen years old while going to school at the University of Rhode Island. I had two goals in life that both revolved around service, to join the Marines like my grandfather, and afterwards become a fireman like my father. I had taken all the certifications, passed all the tests and had gotten hired on the North Kingstown Fire Department for their January 2006 class. But that would have to wait, because I was deploying to Iraq in December 2005.

On September 4, 2006, while on patrol in Fallujah, the vehicle I was in hit an IED. I was severely wounded in the blast resulting in the amputation of my right leg above the knee. I spent the next year recovering from my injuries and learning how to perform day-to-day tasks with a new prosthetic leg at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. At Walter Reed, I quickly realized that my career as a fireman was over before it even began.

While in the hospital, I met a peer mentor, Bob Nillson. Bob is a former Marine who served in Vietnam, so we quickly bonded through our shared experiences. He helped me realize that I had to change my direction in life and guided me towards a career with Turner Construction Company, where for the next five years, I was part of the team that built the Fort Belvoir Community Hospital. Turner also gave me the opportunity to occasionally visit Walter Reed as a peer mentor myself. This experience helped me realize what I really wanted to do. I was fortunate to have enough help and assistance in overcoming my difficulties after losing my leg. I want help veterans in similar circumstances. In order to do that effectively, I need a college degree.

I always had the itch to return to college and finish my undergraduate degree, but before the Post-9/11 GI Bill, it was not financially possible. I had to stay near Washington DC because this is where I had access to my prosthetic care. As some of you may know, changing doctors is difficult enough; changing prosthetists is even harder. I understand other programs would have helped me get through school, but without the Post-9/11 GI Bill living stipend, I could not afford to live independently in this area and focus on finishing my degree full time.

In September I started classes at Georgetown University and made Dean's List in my first Semester. My second semester just started and I'm on track to graduate in about two years, when I can pursue a career in veterans' advocacy.

So why is my story important to the Budget Committee? I am here today as an example of a Veteran whose life plans were changed because of my military service, but thanks to a variety of programs available to me, I was able to adapt and overcome. I could return to school in order to better myself and those around me.

When I arrived at Walter Reed, I knew my life had changed forever. Fortunately, thanks to the programs funded through this committee, whether through the National Defense Authorization or the VA/Military Construction Budget, transitioning service members in situations like mine have the tools to succeed, and I have the opportunity to sit before you today and share my story. Offering Veterans the tools to properly transition back to civilian life, further their education, and ultimately their careers is a benefit to not only the individual veteran, but to our country as a whole.

Continuing to make these programs a priority fulfills our commitment to the men and women who volunteer to serve in harm's way. Don't get me wrong, we understand the risks associated with serving in the military during a time of war, but knowing that the country is prepared to care for us when we come home is critical to morale and the overall welfare of our volunteer military.

I recognize that this committee has difficult decisions to make on the fiscal future of our country. I also recognize that some veterans programs need significant improvements. If I had my way, I would keep investing in programs like peer mentorship, health care – both physical and mental, and education programs like the Post-9/11 GI Bill. I would continue to work on improving military record-keeping so that veterans do not have to hand-carry their paperwork from one hospital to another. I would keep investing in quality VA employees so that veterans can speak to another veteran when they call for help.

I want to go beyond the cliché that these programs are a cost of war. Nobody denies that. But these programs are also an investment in proven leaders. Just look at my Grandfather's generation: The late Sen. Inouye (IN-O-WAY) wanted to become a surgeon, but lost his arm

saving his buddies in World War II. The country invested in veterans like him, who overcame life-changing injuries and found other ways to serve the country they loved. I'm confident that my generation can do it again, but as our troops come home from Afghanistan, we have to continue to invest in them. Chairman Murray, Ranking Member Sessions, members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Patrick Murray is a retired Marine Corps corporal who, while on patrol in Iraq in 2006, lost his leg in an improvised explosive device attack. Murray spent the next year recovering from his injuries at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Prior to his deployment, Murray was an undergraduate student at the University of Rhode Island, where he planned to complete his education and pursue a career as a firefighter. As a result of his injury, Murray needed to choose a new career field. Murray is currently enrolled at Georgetown University where he seeks to complete his education and pursue a career in veterans' advocacy. Murray is also a member of John Lyon VFW Post 3150 in Arlington, Va.