

NEWS RELEASE

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DAV Tells Joint Chiefs Chairman Government is Responsible to Disabled Veterans

WASHINGTON—Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Adm. Mike Mullen’s suggestion that our nation’s philanthropic community should take care of veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan suffering from substance abuse, mental illness and homelessness is clearly out to sea, according to the Disabled American Veterans (DAV).

In his April 26th address to The Council on Foundations, Adm. Mullen said veterans returning home today need help with education, training, medical care, substance abuse and mental health, saying community non-profit groups are the answer to meeting veterans needs. “I am not arguing in any way, shape or form that this should be the purview of our government because what I would like to see happen is community outreach to [servicemembers] and the government just be out of it,” Mullen said.

The DAV sharply disagrees with Adm. Mullen and that his idea is both naive and harmful to the very servicemembers he seeks to help. He diminishes the quality care and treatment provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and its system of medical centers and thousands of clinics across the nation.

“It is the exclusive responsibility of the federal government because it creates disabled veterans,” said DAV Washington Headquarters Executive Director David W. Gorman. “It is the government’s solemn duty to care for and treat all veterans who are wounded and disabled in America’s wars. It is unfathomable that Adm. Mullen would suggest such a plan, asking charities to provide the care now given so compassionately by the VA.”

“The VA has been providing care for disabled veterans for more than 80 years and today offers the finest medical care in our nation,” Gorman said. “The VA doesn’t dismiss veterans who need care. It cares for veterans the rest of their lives. It makes one wonder if Adm. Mullen believes it is best to return to the days when disabled veterans sold pencils on street corners and relied on the support of charitable organizations.”

“Ignoring the professional care of the VA and the responsibility of the federal government to honor the promise to care for disabled veterans shows a great lack of understanding about the needs of our newest generation of veterans,” Gorman said. “Our veterans have a place to turn, and that’s the VA. Veterans service organizations like the DAV lend its support to veterans, but no philanthropic organization, nor all of them united, could undertake the health care services of the VA, which are budgeted at almost \$50 billion in fiscal year 2010.”

VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki has provided extraordinary vision and skillful leadership in developing new programs for the veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He has also reformed VA programs to deal with the hallmark injuries of the wars – traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder and

amputations. Secretary Shinseki's proven leadership is providing the very program that Adm. Mullen seeks to put on the shoulders of charities.

Adm. Mullen's comments dismiss the programs, services and contributions of the VA, Congress, and the administration in support of our nation's wounded warriors. Veterans are not the sole responsibility of charities. The responsibility falls to the Department of Defense (DoD) while they are in uniform and the VA when they leave military service.

"The DAV has the greatest respect for Adm. Mullen and commend his remarkable service to our country, but one must wonder what he was thinking," said Gorman. "Is it that the DoD cannot provide sufficient care for our disabled service members, or that the VA cannot provide the professional and compassionate care it has been providing since these wars have begun. We urge Adm. Mullen to add www.va.gov and www.dav.org to his favorite Web pages to learn and better understand what the VA and committed Veterans Service Organizations do."

The 1.2 million-member Disabled American Veterans, a non-profit organization founded in 1920 and chartered by the U.S. Congress in 1932, represents this nation's disabled veterans. It is dedicated to a single purpose: building better lives for our nation's disabled veterans and their families. For more information, visit the organization's Web site www.dav.org.

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