



May 22, 2018

Chairwoman Comstock and Ranking Member Lipinski of the Subcommittee on Research and Technology, Chairman Weber and Ranking Member Lipinski of the subcommittee on Energy, and members of both subcommittees, thank you for having me today.

On September 11, 2001, I was running floor trading operations for Goldman Sachs, at Ground Zero in New York City. As I watched the first responders running into the carnage of that day, I resolved to do something to give back to those who serve.

I'm still a financial services executive, now at S&P. But in the years since that day, my passion project has become SoldierStrong. SoldierStrong is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization committed to improving the lives of our service men and women and veterans. I chair the organization, and accomplish most of its work from a cell phone and an i-pad on my train commute to and from the office each day.

SoldierStrong's work started with a request from a forward operating base in Afghanistan to send basic supplies like tube socks and baby wipes for forward deployed troops. Over the years, we assembled and sent over 75,000 pounds of supplies to 73 deployed units.

As the wars wound down, we contemplated closing down until one of our board members asked whether the troops we had served had everything they needed when they came home and began life anew as veterans.

Our post-war work began with scholarships, including a General Fund scholarship to fill gaps in the post-9/11 GI Bill, and specific scholarships to select institutions. These include the Maxwell School at Syracuse University (the top public service school in the country), the Walsh School at Georgetown University (the top foreign policy school in the country), and a scholarship for veterans who are women in STEM at Old Dominion University.

As important as these scholarships are, we felt there was still a gaping hole in veteran care. So many of our service people survived injuries in Iraq or Afghanistan that would not have been survivable in previous conflicts. Advances in battlefield medicine needed to be met with advances in care for veterans who had sustained such grievous injuries.

In retrospect, one day in particular would bring this question into focus for me. April 27, 2011 was my daughter's fifth birthday. We celebrated like many families, with chocolate

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cake and ice cream, and generally without a care in the world. 6800 miles away, Dan Rose was being medevac'd from the battle field to Khandahar. The vehicle he was in had hit an IED, and his injuries would rob him of the ability to walk. Dan's experience that day was a personal reminder of how much we owe our veterans, and how their sacrifices allow all of us to take for granted the lives we're blessed to live here. Two years after his injury, Dan would become the first recipient of our SoldierSuit, empowering him to walk once again.

Today, SoldierStrong finds the most advanced mobility devices and prosthetics on the market and makes them available to injured veterans who otherwise would not have access to them.

The collection of devices we currently fund comprise the "SoldierSuit", which covers full-body, upper-body, and lower-body mobility devices. One example is the Ekso Suit, which allows paralyzed veterans to stand and walk again with robotic assistance. The physical and psychological impacts of being able to get up out of a wheelchair and stand at eye level with the world again are profound. In fact, we are partnering with the Denver VA to complete a formal study on the mental health impacts of access to this technology.

Another example is the Luke Arm, which is the first and only prosthetic arm that replaces the full range of motion from the shoulder, through the elbow, to the wrist, hand, and fingers. It is the first arm that works "just like the original equipment."

We provide a third device, called the Myopro, which is a myoelectric arm brace for veterans who have upper body impairment due to traumatic brain injury.

A fourth device, the Bionx ankle, allows a lower body prosthesis to walk without the characteristic limp caused by most prosthetic legs.

As with many advanced technologies, these devices tend to be very expensive, with our average device costing nearly \$100,000 per unit. Two of our more capable devices cost nearly \$200,000 per unit.

We've learned over the years that most of the devices we provide were first developed for frontline servicemen and women via DARPA.

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America's commitment to putting cutting edge technology on our warfighters is exceptional, is a point of national pride, and should extend (but currently does not extend) to our veterans who bear the physical consequences of service to our country.

We work closely with more than a dozen VA medical centers around the country which have received one or more of our devices. The people of the VA care deeply about our veterans, but are sometimes held back by arcane regulations that have not kept pace with modern technological advancement.

Thanks to SoldierStrong, 25,000 veterans have access to one of these devices. We believe every injured veteran has earned the right to the best technology American ingenuity can provide. Yet one of the tragedies of post 9/11 veteran care is that too many veterans must rely on charitable organizations like ours for access to the medical help they need.

Though it sounds like science fiction, it really hits you that these capabilities are quite real when you see a veteran roll into a room in a wheelchair, but stand for the first time in years and actually walk back out of that same room. I have with me a short video showing how this technology works. This video was made during one of our device donations to the VA.

Madam chair, the video concludes my remarks today. I look forward to answering questions from the subcommittee.

Christopher D. Meek
Chairman & Founder
SoldierStrong

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