

MINUTES
SENATE HEALTH & WELFARE COMMITTEE

DATE: Wednesday, March 06, 2019
TIME: 3:00 P.M.
PLACE: Room WW54
MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Martin, Senators Heider, Harris, Burtenshaw, Bayer, Jordan, and Nelson
ABSENT/ EXCUSED: Vice Chairman Souza and Senator Lee

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: **Chairman Martin** called the meeting of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee (Committee) to order at 3:00 p.m.

HJM 7 **Representative Brooke Green** introduced retired Captain Mike Anderson, United States Army veteran, who lost both legs and sustained significant abdominal trauma from an improvised explosive device while serving in Afghanistan. **Representative Green** stated that **HJM 7** sends a message to our congressional delegation that a very flawed policy is impacting our most critically injured combat veterans returning home from war. Former Senator Marv Hagedorn, Administrator, Idaho Division of Veterans Administration, was recently in Washington, D.C. and had this conversation with the Secretary to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. This joint memorial is just one step further in a long process to take care of our veterans.

Captain Anderson explained that during his initial recovery, he was too worried about living to worry about procreating. His wife was pregnant before his deployment and their son was one month old at the time the Captain sustained injuries. His child motivated him to fight hard to survive. Over time, he and his wife wanted to grow their family. In addition to losing both legs, his testicles were severely damaged. The U.S. Army covered intrauterine insemination for his family and in 2016 they welcomed their second child. In 2017, the Captain retired. He and his wife hoped for a third child, and went to the Veteran's Hospital where they were told it would be covered. However, the referral for in vitro fertilization was denied. The hospital assumed it was denied in error and resubmitted it, but it was denied again. The hospital discovered a flaw in policy: it states that any veteran that has been rendered sterile by combat action is not eligible for fertility treatment. **Captain Anderson** shared that, of all the things he has had to cope with, not being able to give his wife a family was heartbreaking. Infertility treatment can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and is out of the scope of most veterans that are 100 percent disabled.

Captain Anderson stated that this memorial is to let the U.S. Congress know that Idaho supports its veterans and families and there should be no reason why being injured in combat should prevent you from being able to have a family. He wondered what good was left in life for a 19 year-old who, after being seriously injured, is then told he cannot have a family. There are hundreds of veterans in the same position, but because of the personal nature of their injuries, they not speak about it. **Captain Anderson** stated that the reason he is here today is because most won't talk about this injury. He is bringing forward this discussion so the rest of them don't have to.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Heider** shared that he was a medic in the military and thanked Captain Anderson for his willingness to testify in front of the Committee.

Senator Jordan thanked Captain Anderson for his courage in bringing this issue forward and asked if there were any ways beside this joint memorial in which the Legislature could help; perhaps by contacting individuals. **Captain Anderson** explained that in his experience, bills related to this issue die in committee. He emphasized that all he is asking for is that medical benefits that cover some veterans, cover all veterans.

MOTION: **Senator Bayer** moved to send **HJM 7** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Harris** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Martin** adjourned the meeting at 3:15 p.m.

Senator Martin
Chair

Margaret Major
Secretary