

## *From the office of the President:*

**A**s a U.S. Marine combat veteran who served in Vietnam, I own a continuing commitment to the oath I took on 5 December, 1968, an oath of allegiance to the constitution and to the people of the United States of America. For more than 30 years, the mission of speaking out on behalf of those serving in the U.S. military, veterans, and all military families has been a personal passion. In February, 2005, I found a home among like-minded people in Milwaukee, Wisconsin at the founding gathering of what was to become Veterans and Military Families for Progress.

We were at war and there was a palpable energy among veterans and members of military families at the time. We were concerned that the one percent of the nation sacrificing and experiencing these wars firsthand was forgotten by the rest of the country. Worse, we realized plans and resources were not set aside to take care of these veterans once they returned home. And so, many of us from around the country, veterans, those serving, and military family members came to Milwaukee and founded Veterans and Military Families for Progress.

The terrible snow storm I encountered on the way home from that initial gathering was thawed by the sense of selfless service I had witnessed over that weekend as I reflected on our work there, and the daunting task ahead of us. A veteran friend in Iowa created a red, white, and blue wristband expressing that energy as "A Second Call To Duty." I wear it to this day and it reminds me of the great honor and privilege bestowed upon me as I serve as your newly elected president.

When we send those in uniform into combat, the decision to go to war includes absolute commitments to them and their families. A decision to go to war includes the commitment to have the overwhelming support of the American people, overwhelming force to ensure a successful mission, and an exit strategy. That is the Powell Doctrine, and we were reminded of it at our founding gathering in Milwaukee by Medal of Honor recipient, "Buddy" Bucca. While VMFP stays out of war policy, the decision to go to war also includes taking care of military families during deployment and caring for them and their beloved veterans upon coming home.

The coming home issues have been the focus of VMFP and it is our mission to make sure all Americans understand and comprehend the rights and needs of those who have served, are serving, and their families. It is our mission to make sure Congress recognizes and keeps these constituents in mind and it is our mission to ensure laws, regulations and public policy protect and address their needs.

During our first four years, we have made tremendous headway toward our mission.

Thanks to our founding president, Matt Cary, and the leadership of the previous two boards and national committee chairs, we led the movement to recognize the sacrifices and needs of military families as an essential 21st Century element in the pre-, ongoing-, and post-war commitments of our nation. For the first time in history, America's First Lady considers "Military Families" as her signature issue. VMFP has amassed political capitol and credibility with Congress and the Executive Branch, as several endorsed candidates who signed on to our mission statement and principles hold national office now, including President Obama. VMFP has seen a good percentage of our endorsed legislation signed into law.

But the mission is far from complete. We have endorsed numerous bills which are awaiting passage. And for the first time, we have introduced two VMFP policy initiatives which we are currently pressing for adoption. The policy initiatives call for a first-ever comprehensive national veteran and military family policy, and a veteran and military family savings bond to fund its externalities not covered under the Department of Veterans Affairs budget. If adopted, the first provides an overarching program to fill gaps in current veteran and military family program offerings. It may require legislative support to implement. The savings bond program offers an opportunity for the remaining 99 percent of American people to become direct stakeholders in the incredible post-war costs facing the country in the form of long term physical and psychological care and program support to those who have served in uniform and their families.

During its initial four years, VMFP focused on the political and legislative elements of its mission statement. VMFP will continue that work going forward. But as I lead the organization forward in the next two years, my aim is to grow the first element of our mission – to be "understood by the American public." I believe that the American people care about our mission. I believe they just do not have enough information about the specific issues, and more importantly, about how to become stakeholders in the solutions.

To that end, we have created the VMFP Education Task Force. Our new Executive Vice President, Jan Donatelli, has recruited Ginny Narsete to lead the taskforce. Ginny's background and experience will serve VMFP's mission well, as we take our mission to the general public, and you will hear more from Ginny in the near future.

Another part of moving forward is to grow

our membership. Again, Jan has identified and recruited a new VMFP National Membership Committee Chair, Jeff Jenkins. Jeff is already establishing regional structures, and we will all be looking forward to his first report at the November Board of Directors meeting. As the VMFP "boots on the ground" in your state and region, please consider your state and region and be prepared to help Jeff in whatever way you can.

These new leaders are bringing fresh energy and ideas to related areas for the positive development of the VMFP mission. Please join me in welcoming them and lending them your support.

We will need to increase our resources in order to maximize our mission within the public arena and the final focus of impetus for the next two years is Fund Raising. Matt Cary, our newly installed Executive Director, has accepted the role of leadership in the area of fund raising. He will be expanding our outreach efforts to the corporate, foundation, and philanthropic community as we ask all of America to join us in supporting the veteran and military family community.

All members of our volunteer Board of Directors are being challenged to accept leadership roles, and to enhance national committees' reach and effectiveness as new volunteers are identified and step up to assist. All VMFP members are asked to become stakeholders in our organization's mission. We need secretary, assistant, and committee team member support for all of our standing committees. Please volunteer 2, 5, 10 or more hours per month and play a part in changing America, in fulfilling the VMFP mission.

A selfless sense of service drives why we serve in uniform and why we support loved ones and family members who serve or have served. VMFP is a service opportunity knocking, with a mission that unifies our country like no other. Be invested in VMFP as we continue to change and awaken that 99 percent of America, finally, to the rights and needs of those who serve, have served, and their families. Let VMFP be your "second call to duty."

In closing, let me say once again that I am honored to be your president, and truly appreciate the service, effort, and leadership of Matt Cary and all the former VMFP leadership team.

Sincerely,

Tom Howe, President  
Veterans and Military Families for Progress

