

VITAL SPEECHES

— OF THE DAY —

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THE BEST THOUGHTS OF THE BEST MINDS ON CURRENT NATIONAL QUESTIONS
IMPARTIAL · CONSTRUCTIVE · AUTHENTIC

taking our future back from the grips of central planners who would control our healthcare, who would spend our treasure, who downgrade our future and micro-manage our lives.

It is time to limit and simplify the taxes in this country. We have to quit spending money we don't have. We need to get our fiscal house in order and restore our good credit. And we will repeal this President's misguided, one-size-fits-all government healthcare plan immediately.

We'll create jobs. We'll get America working again. We'll create jobs and we'll build wealth, we'll truly educate and innovate in science, and in technology, engineering and math. We'll create the jobs and the progress needed to get

America working again.

And I'll promise you this: I'll work every day to make Washington, D.C. as inconsequential in your life as I can. And at the same time, we'll be freeing our families and small businesses and states from the burdensome and costly federal government so those groups can create, innovate and succeed.

I believe in America. I believe in Her purpose and Her promise. I believe Her best days have not yet been lived. I believe Her greatest deeds are reserved for the generations to come. With the help and the courage of the American people, we will get our country working again. God bless you and God bless the United States of America. ♦

How a Camel and Congress Put Me Where I Am Today

A WOUNDED VETERAN'S PATH BACK TO PRODUCTIVITY

Address by NATHAN SHORT, Veteran, Iraq War

Delivered at National Contract Management Association's World Congress, Denver, Colo., July 12, 2011

Good afternoon. It's an honor to be here. My name is Nathan Short and I'm here today because of a camel and Congress.

I grew up in Oklahoma City with my parents and 2 sisters. I was an active kid who was always riding bikes, skateboarding or swimming or fishing.

I even used to ride broncos in the rodeo.

I was pretty fearless. My mom says it was too bad Rita-Lin wasn't around because I was a good candidate for that. As a kid I thought, "When I grow up, I want to be a G. I. Joe—a Soldier in the Army." When I graduated high school, I enlisted in the Army National Guard. My parents were all for it. They were proud of me.

I went to Basic Training at Ft. Knox, Kentucky.

Unlike a lot of people, I actually liked it.

People thought I was crazy, but I like being in the dirt and the mud and doing P.T.

Both of my parents went to my Basic Training Graduation. When I got my class "a" uniform on for the first time—it was awesome. I felt honored to wear it.

After Basic, I learned to drive and maneuver military trucks at Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri. After I finished my training, I made two of the biggest decisions of my life.

I went active duty in the Army, and I married my wife Courtney. Courtney and I dreamed about far-off locations where the Army might send us like Washington State, Colorado or even Italy. After all that excitement, I got stationed at Ft. Sill in Southern Oklahoma.

Only an hour and half away from where I grew up!

So we moved to Ft. Sill a week after we got married.

My job at Ft. Sill was driving trucks. I hauled anything from ammo for the Artillery to office supplies.

I was at Ft. Sill for a little over three years when our son,

Spencer, was born in April of '02. When he was 8 months old, I received my orders to go to Iraq.

They said that I could be over there for up to a year. Courtney was scared. She hated it.

My mom took it the hardest. She was crying the whole time, afraid that I might not make it back to her.

Actually, I was nervous too. I didn't know what to expect.

In January of '03, I packed my stuff up and boarded a plane at Lawton Ft. Sill Airport. I knew all the guys who were going with me. They were now my family. We landed in Kuwait.

To my surprise, it was cold and windy.

I remember seeing the flames coming out of the oil refineries.

I was stationed at Truckville in Kuwait.

We'd get shipments from the port in Iraq.

And then take the supplies from camp to camp.

Mostly I delivered concrete bunkers, which are like portable roofs and walls.

We would put sand bags all around them for protection against mortar and RPG attacks.

I would always drive with one other soldier.

We were like brothers.

On April 20, 2004, my squad leader SSGT Williamson was driving a PLS, or Palletized Load System tactical truck. It's a 5 axle, 10 wheel truck that can hold up to 16 ½ tons. It can basically go on any type of terrain.

It has a light steel aluminum cab with a solid steel trailer.

We were on our way from the port in Iraq to Truckville and we had just crossed the border into Kuwait.

We were going about 65 miles an hour when about 15 to 20 camels walked onto the road.

We were told that camel herders got paid a reward if

they sent their animals in front of American vehicles.

It had never happened to us, but we heard of it before.

One of the trucks ahead of us hit a camel.

It started running up the middle of the road.

There was another PLS in front of us.

And it slammed on its brakes.

SSGT Williamson didn't have enough room to stop—we had to either go right or left.

There was a car with a family of kids to the right, so we went left.

We clipped the trailer on the back of the PLS in front of us. The steel trailer crushed our aluminum cab.

The impact knocked me out.

When I came to, I was hanging over the ground because I still had my seatbelt on.

People started getting out of their vehicles to see what was going on.

There were some mechanics in the vehicle behind us and they came out help.

Staff Sergeant Williamson asked me what hurt and told me keep my eyes open. At the time, nothing hurt. I guess I was in shock.

I was trying to catch my breath, and I thought that the truck might catch fire, so I gave him my knife and told him to cut me out of my seatbelt.

Once he cut me out, I tried to walk but everyone around could see my leg was broken and they all said, "No no no lay down." I was trained to be a combat lifesaver, so I told them to get my CLS bag with medical supplies. Three soldiers in a humvee showed up.

They were reservists and they used the supplies from the CLS bag to wrap my leg up and they pretty much took over.

If you look in the lower left part of this picture, you can see them. Those are my legs in bandages.

They called in a medivac and popped smoke to show the helicopter where to land.

While I was lying there, my body started aching.

I could feel rocks in my back.

The guys around me were putting their hands under me, saying "No, there are no rocks on the ground."

I kept saying "Yes there is," but they couldn't find any.

I found out later that what I felt was my own broken bones.

The medivac arrived in about 8 minutes.

Getting on the helicopter was very painful, because they put me on a hard wooden stretcher.

I was trying to go to sleep but the flight medic kept asking me questions to keep me awake.

In about 20 minutes or so we landed at the hospital in Kuwait City. There was an ambulance waiting.

They took me straight to the operating room, where I passed out.

I'm not sure if it was from the pain or if they gave me drugs.

I have no memory of the next 30 days or so, but I have pieced together the story from my family and friends.

I later learned that I talked to my wife and mom on

somebody's cell phone.

I confused them because I kept telling them that I would be fine.

They didn't know that I had been hurt so they were confused about why I kept saying that I would be fine. After a stop at Kuwait City Hospital, I flew to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. During the flight to Germany, an infection spread through my entire body.

By this point, my family knew about my accident.

They were talking about about flying out to Germany to say goodbye.

They didn't think I would make it much longer.

My condition stabilized and I was flown to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in DC.

By the time I got there, the infection had gotten worse.

My body swelled up like a balloon and I got pneumonia. My mom and Courtney were there.

They could barely recognize me.

I was twice my normal size.

The doctor told my family that they didn't expect me to make it through the weekend.

My mom called everyone in my family and told them to get up there.

They asked churches to pray for me.

They had 35 to 40 churches praying for me across the states of Oklahoma, Georgia, Ohio, Tennessee and California.

It was at this time that I started waking up every now and then and recognizing my family.

I don't remember any of this, but I do remember having some crazy dreams.

Kind of spiritual stuff. I dreamt that people were after me and I dreamt that I died. One of the most memorable dreams was a guy in a dark robe reading me my last rites. And my family was praying and fighting to keep me alive. Then somehow they replaced my blood.

And then a man in a white robe with a dark red sash told me, "You have all new blood, and you got a new birthday." That's when I woke up.

The first thing I remember is two nurses talking around me. And they were surprised to see me awake. They explained to me that I was at Walter Reed in Washington DC.

I was so thirsty. The first thing I said was "Can I have a Dr. Pepper?"

My wife and mom were already at Walter Reed when I woke up, and Spencer came a few days later.

This is his first memory of me, and to this day he tells people that he and his mommy found me at the hospital. He thinks that's where I came from.

Spencer was 2 years old and he wanted me to pick him up and hold him. But I couldn't lift him.

It was so good to see him and my wife.

The nurses told me that I had metal in my hip and pelvis that would be in my body for the rest of my life. I sustained injuries to my intestines, my wrist, my right foot and my ankle.

There was a rod in my leg and pins in my ankle.

Because of permanent nerve damage, I have "drop foot" which means I cannot point my toes towards my leg.

They told me that I wouldn't be able to run for the rest of my life.

I talked to the other guys at Walter Reed about our injuries. Most of them talked about bombs and IEDs. There I was, telling people my injury was caused by a camel. Kinda funny.

This is a picture of Tom Hanks.

He was in DC to dedicate the World War Two Memorial and he stopped by Walter Reed.

I came home to Oklahoma City on June 2, 2004, in a wheelchair. The flight was miserable because my injuries were so painful.

When I got to Will Rogers Airport in Oklahoma City, my lieutenant and buddies from my unit at Fort Sill were there. And my family and friends were all there with balloons and signs for me. It was awesome.

I thought it was cool that they were so supportive.

It was hard to see my old friends from the Army and high school when they saw me in a wheelchair.

They were used to seeing me skateboarding and riding my bike so they didn't know what to say when they saw me like that.

My wife started working as a temp while I went to physical therapy appointments and watched Spencer.

I had to learn to walk again and practice putting weight on my foot. The doctors told me it would be a year before I would walk again. I decided it would be faster than that. All the goals they gave me, I adjusted to make them happen a little faster.

By October I was out of my wheelchair. Then, they took the pins out of my foot. I used crutches and then a cane, and now I walk by myself.

But I will have a limp for the rest of my life.

Physically, I healed quickly. But emotionally, I struggled. My wife noticed it. My family noticed it.

I guess I was in a depression. I got out of it though. My stepdad knows I love tinkering with trucks. So he gave me his old beat up truck—a '78 GMC Sierra—to work on.

But I had to drive 400 miles away to pick it up.

That got me out of bed and put me in a good mood again.

I guess the way to my heart is through a truck.

So in November, I went back to my unit at Fort Sill in a desk job. I taught classes on safety and how to drive trucks. In May 2005, my medical retirement came through and I was given my walking papers. Because of this injury, I get some compensation and other benefits from the VA for the rest of my life.

However, it's not enough money to support me and my family.

The VA recognized that with this injury,

I could still perform some jobs.

The question I faced was... what kind of job would be right for me? I had six years of military training, and I was no longer in the military. I had five years of truck driving

training, and I could no longer be a truck driver. I had to start a new career.

Looking back, I think I was in denial about my injuries. I thought I could just find a new job like nothing ever happened.

I found out it wouldn't be that easy.

As soon as I retired, I got a job at a factory and I started on Monday.

The first day went fine, and the second day I started to feel some pain in my leg and hip.

I get pain in my hip when I sit for too long.

And I get pain in my leg if I stand for too long.

I asked my supervisor if I could walk around to ease the pain. But they said I couldn't.

They had to be strict on breaks.

It was so painful that I knew I had to find something else. Courtney was upset but she understood. So by Friday, I quit. I could tell they felt bad, but there wasn't much they could do. So I got another job through a friend, counseling kids at a group home. The kids were between the ages of 13 and 18 and they had substance abuse problems.

I enjoyed working with the kids. They wanted to know about my experiences in the Army. It was a very rewarding job, but sometimes we would have to physically restrain them. And I was not supposed to be lifting anything heavy.

I had hurt my back once, and I didn't want to jeopardize my recovery.

I was about to give up hope when I heard about a non-profit agency called Professional Contract Services, Incorporated, or PCSI.

A friend saw an ad in the newspaper that PCSI was looking for people who had experience with trucks to work on a Vehicle Operations, Maintenance & Analysis contract at Tinker Air Force Base. And they were actually looking for people with disabilities. I didn't have to hide it.

I went in for an interview and got the job. The reason they were recruiting people with disabilities is because of the AbilityOne Program. It's a public law that was passed by Congress.

You may know it as Federal Acquisition Regulation part 8.7, also known as "Acquisition from Nonprofit Agencies Employing People who are blind or Severely Disabled."

It helps people with disabilities find employment.

The idea behind the Program is that these people will gain job skills and then graduate from the program and find competitive employment.

It's designed to help people with disabilities get off welfare and benefits, and turn tax users into tax payers.

The nonprofit organizations in this Program provide accommodations to help people with disabilities be successful. So if my leg was hurting, I was allowed to get up to walk the pain out. They could be flexible when I had to go to the doctors to get new braces.

At the other jobs, my physical disability made me unable to compete with others with the same skills.

But on the AbilityOne contract,

I worked with 42 other people with disabilities.

Many of them struggled to find work like I did.
Once we found a place where we fit in, we all really wanted to stay there.
We didn't leave at 4 o'clock.
We stayed until the job was done.
My experience in dealing with military vehicles was very important.

I was working with the same kind of vehicles I had in the Army. At Tinker, they ship trucks out. They have to know exactly how to prepare a truck to be shipped out. I used to be the guy on the other side of the shipment.

So I have a special knowledge of how these things work. I know the trucks inside and out.

This was a good job for me on a lot of levels.

After working on this contract for two years, I got offered a promotion.

I am now a Quality Assurance Manager at the corporate headquarters of PCSI in Austin, Texas.

I inspect facilities to ensure compliance with ISO 9000 standards.

I moved my family from Oklahoma to Texas in April of 2010. My wife loves it and my son does too.

Aside from all the Longhorn fans, I love it there too.

I am no longer part of an AbilityOne contract.

I graduated on. But I will *never* forget the important role that this Program played in *my* life and *my family's* life.

I am now working full-time, my wife is a stay-at-home mom and our son is in fourth grade.

We have 2 cars, and we live in a 4 bedroom house in Kyle, Texas.

One of our relatives was having some problems.

So we took custody of 3 more kids.

But it wasn't for the AbilityOne Program;

I would have struggled to support my own family.

Not to mention three more kids.

So now you know how a camel and Congress put me where I am today.

The accident almost took my life and then my career.

And Congress helped me get it back.

The AbilityOne Program helped me see that I am not a DIS-abled veteran but an EN-abled veteran.

Thousands of veterans have come home wounded so far.

The statistics can be overwhelming.

A lot of us see the news and wonder,

"What could I possibly do to help?"

What impact can one person really have?"

Well, one person signed an AbilityOne contract at Tinker Air Force Base.

And that person changed my life. Because they put a pen to paper, a 26 year old Iraq veteran got the opportunity to have a successful career again.

It's your day to day job to carry out the Federal Acquisition Regulations.

You might think the FAR is boring, but I'm here to show you, it's not. The FAR saved my career.

If it wasn't for FAR 8.7, I would not be here today.

But I am just one individual who benefits from the AbilityOne program—I am told that there are more than 45,000 people employed through this program.

In closing, it was an honor to serve my country in uniform. I thought it was a great country before. And I think it's an even better one now.

Because I see what kind of country this is.

It's a country that supports soldiers not just *during* the war, but also *after* the war.

And it's a country where the AbilityOne Program helped more than 45,000 people with disabilities get up and go to work today.

To all of you who have ever signed an AbilityOne contract: THANK YOU on behalf of myself and all current and past AbilityOne employees.

When you go back to your office, and a contract requirement comes across your desk, remember FAR part 8.7. And please remember to think AbilityOne first. Thank you. ♦