

**Prepared Remarks of Annette L. McLeod  
Wife of SPC Wendell W. McLeod, Jr  
Government Reform and Oversight Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives**

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, it is a distinct honor to be here to discuss the medical care of my husband and other wounded soldiers while at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

My name is Annette L. McLeod. I am from Chesterfield, South Carolina, where I reside with my husband. His name is Wendell W. McLeod, Jr. Friends call him Dell for short. Until his medical retirement in October of 2006, he was a member of the 1/178th Field Artillery Unit from Manning, South Carolina. He has several Military Occupational Specialties and was deployed as a 92G (food services). He has been a soldier for 19 years and 10 months, with almost 17 of them being in the South Carolina National Guard. He sustained multiple injuries while serving in Kuwait near the Iraqi border. The most extensive injury was a traumatic brain injury, secondary herniated discs in the lower and upper back, and a ganglion cyst in the right shoulder. While his injuries aren't visible, they have caused him great difficulty with everyday life.

Dell may be the injured one, but we have both had a stressful and painful journey through the medical system at Walter Reed. After long conversations, we decided that I should tell our story so that retribution would not be taken against him during future evaluations. It is my hope that, by sharing our pain and our experiences, no more family members will have to suffer at the hands of the bureaucratic fiasco at Walter Reed.

Dell was injured on July 6, 2005, while doing inventory on a food transport truck. After receiving treatment and tests he was kept under observation by doctors in Kuwait and Germany. Many days later he was assigned orders to medivac to Walter Reed for further treatment. I was never notified of his accident nor his medivac until he was back in the United States. He called me himself from Fort Dix, Maryland. I find this very upsetting. Finally, on August 8, 2005, he came to Walter Reed. I took leave from my job and went to stay with him in Washington, D.C.

His appointments were very sporadic, and during this time he became very agitated. He had outbursts of anger and hostility, followed by tears and depression. He would get angry that he couldn't remember simple things, like someone's name or his medication. He would go from one emotion to the next, living next to me as though he were a stranger. I noticed that he would forget simple things like his hat and wallet. He would forget to brush his teeth. He would forget to shave. On several occasions I expressed my concerns to his case manager. I know what Dell is capable of, and I knew that there was truly something wrong with him. It wasn't until late September that the case manager made an appointment to have brain injury evaluations done. At my persistent urging, an

R-Bands test was run.

Dell also had numbness in his leg and could only move one of his arms a short range. He couldn't stand straight and would trip over his feet. Because I was persistent, doctors finally decided to run some tests. They did an MRI of his back and shoulder. They did an EMG on the lower back and he was scheduled for a pain management appointment and an epidural injection in his back. He received physical therapy for his shoulder and back and the epidural injection between September and December 2005.

We finally found out the results of the R-Bands test in December, 2005. According to doctors, something had gone wrong with the brain testing, and as a result Dell had to do a complete Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) test. The test took 3 days to complete, 7 hours per day. I was not allowed to stay with him so I sat in the waiting room, waiting and watching. According to Dell, doctors asked him if he had always been a slow learner. He said no, but he did admit to being in Title I math and reading while in grammar school. The TBI clinic deemed his brain injury test inconclusive, saying that "he didn't try hard enough and that his lack of effort showed signs of over-exaggeration of his physical injuries." They stated that Dell appeared to be intellectually slow and that this was the cause of his problem. They also said he over-exaggerated his injuries so that he could get attention. The doctor concluded that Dell had a pre-morbid learning disability—in other words, that he had learning problems before his injury and not because of the injury—and within a few months his paperwork noted that, rather than being in Title I reading and math, he had been in Special Education classes. The doctors had labeled him as being retarded. This upset Dell terribly, because he knew that it was a lie. Lots of children have trouble learning math and reading in grammar school, but it doesn't mean they are retarded. I believe Dell received very little support during these tests, and for the 3 days he was taking them he did not receive his pain medication.

In January 2006, Dell's primary care doctor put him on cholesterol medication and told him to have bloodwork every month to make sure his liver wasn't affected. He was sent to Lakeview Virginia Neurocare for treatment, where he would receive compensatory measures to enable him to live independently. His case manager assured me that any treatment for the back or shoulder injuries, and the bloodwork, would be performed in Virginia. If not, the Army would bring him to Walter Reed for treatment. This never happened. By March 2006, Dell had no further injections in his back, no treatment for his orthopedic injuries, and no bloodwork for his cholesterol medicine. He was taken back to Walter Reed after being in Virginia for 10 weeks. After Dell was not able to meet some of the facility's goals for independent living, it was stated that he would need to live a supervised life and would need help with basic daily living tasks.

I also want to note that, while at Lakeview, another soldier befriended Dell and stole his social security number and password for several of our important accounts. It took me 6 months to get everything straightened out. When going to his chain of command, the comment I heard was: "How do I know you are not having marital problems?" It didn't seem to concern his commanders that I had no money to live on and that everything we had was at risk. Only one person in finance would help me stop this intruder from taking

everything we had. I was told I couldn't press charges because the money was transferred electronically and it wasn't put in the intruder's name. We could have lost everything. My husband didn't realize what had happened until I explained everything to him. He understood then that a soldier had stolen his social security number and password during a friendly chat and was able to access our accounts.

By late March, Dell's case manager had started his Medical Evaluation Board process without following up on his orthopedic injuries. Dell's case manager told him, "You have been here almost a year, it is time for you to move on and live the best you can with the injuries." Her favorite thing to say was: "The Veteran's Administration (VA) will take care of you, they are extremely good with long-term treatment."

Finally, in April of 2006, Dell got an appointment with the orthopedic surgeon to prepare him for possible shoulder surgery. The doctor ordered another MRI to compare it with the first. When the case manager was given the job of making his appointment, she denied him the test. She said that the Army doesn't have the money, and that she didn't feel the MRI would change anything. This particular case manager got upset with me for trying to explain to her that, if the doctor didn't think the test was necessary before scheduling surgery, he wouldn't have ordered it. Still, she simply denied him treatment.

By June of 2006 Dell had extremely high liver profile tests. Nobody had followed up with bloodwork after he was put on the cholesterol medication. On June 23, 2006, Dell was finally scheduled for a shoulder MRI. The test showed a ganglion cyst in the ball and socket joint of the right shoulder, and it had caused damage. The doctor said there was no need to do surgery, as the damage was non-repairable.

At this point, I began speaking with staff for this Committee. After a congressional investigation into our situation, the commander of the hospital and the brigade called me into a conference. They were more than eager to try to sort things out. We agreed that Dell needed more cognitive treatment but Walter Reed was not equipped for out-patient occupational therapy to help with the brain injury. He was set up by his case manager to get occupational and speech therapy at the Washington, D.C. branch of the VA. He was then given more brain injury testing to see if there had been a true honest effort put in originally. The head of the TBI clinic told me that, this time, the tests did find memory loss and cognitive deficiency consistent with a mild brain injury.

With the help of this committee, Dell was given a 50% disability rating, leaving his benefits intact. His ratings were as follows: anxiety disorder 30%, cognitive disorder and headaches 10%, chronic low back pain 10%, and chronic shoulder pain 10%. The brain injury itself didn't warrant a percentage at all, because the Army considered it a pre-existing condition and a matter of low intellectual capacity. I don't understand how the Army could consider Dell to be smart enough for deployment, but then claim the cognitive problems he now exhibits have existed from childhood. The Army put a label on him and pushed him to the side, denying him the treatment he needed. He admitted that he was in Title I as a child, but that never hindered him from serving in the military. He did his duty to his country, to the Army, and to his fellow soldiers, and now I want to

know: when will the Army do right by him? The other question I have is this: what happens to the injured soldiers who don't have someone to advocate for them, as I did for my husband? Someone needs to stand up against this broken system.

Before I close, I would like to tell you a little bit more about my husband. Dell is the kindest person I have ever known. Among his friends, he is known as an all-around nice guy. He has a simple life, working hard and trying to live comfortably. He worked while going through high school and still was able to graduate with his class. He loved sports, mainly football, fishing, and playing pool. He was always eager to lend a helping hand, making people feel special to be his friend. He loved to read and has a vast collection of books. He could make you smile with hardly any effort, and his own smile had such a beautiful glow. His father was a Marine. Dell loved the military and it was his dream to follow in his father's footsteps. He considered it an honor to serve his country and managed his paperwork and responsibilities on his own with no help from me. He took pride in his daily hygiene, often telling me: "This is the way the Army taught me to do it." He shined his boots until they sparkled. He held the record of expert shooter with the M-16 in his prior units and often was called "the master of shot." He loved the bragging rights that came with wearing the uniform. He wasn't afraid of anything.

Now I am married to a man I no longer know. Dell has become very timid, very vulnerable. There are few things that truly seem to make him happy. Most of the time he is in a daze, trying to find his way back to normalcy but not knowing how to accomplish the task. He has reminders pasted on the walls telling him to brush his teeth, shave, and take his medication. His "meds" are in a weekly and daily pill planner so that he knows he has taken them, but I have to double check everything behind him to make sure all is done and in order. He can't finish a project without help and he can't remember the things that used to be so important to him. He triple checks the locks to make sure he locked the doors. He is often scared of the dark. He has lost his life as he knew it, his freedom and his independence. He hasn't driven since the injury, and when somebody else is driving he constantly grabs the steering wheel in fear of traffic. He spends his life in his own little world, not knowing what is going on with the real world. His days are uneventful, unless I am able to compel him to get out and about. He spends his time being angry and not knowing how to vent his frustration. He just can't seem to adapt to society. He often overcompensates for his injury and tries to make excuses for being slow, or not remembering the simple tasks he has to do. We both know that the brain injury changed his life, but the bureaucracy of the Army pretends that its tests know better.

I have so much compassion and respect for the families of the injured and wounded soldiers. I realize the tremendous sacrifice that my husband and thousands of other soldiers made during the deployment. Risking their lives and being away from those they love so dearly to protect and serve our wonderful country and defending our freedom, they give so freely of themselves and ask so little of those at home and in our country. It concerns me greatly that the Army and the Medholdover system has let Dell and other National Guardsmen down. Forcing them to live in unsanitary conditions, and delaying and sometimes denying them medical care, jeopardizes their recovery and causes them more stress as they battle the mountains of paperwork, case managers, and doctors.

Thank you for your time. Again, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on my husband's behalf. I respect the work of the Committee and I know you will do what is right. Our time at Walter Reed is over, except for a re-evaluation in 2008. The others that follow in our path will have hopefully an easier path to walk, as we have already paved the way with our tears. I would not want anyone to go through the anguish we have suffered during our stay at Walter Reed. I do hope that the injured and wounded will receive better treatment than Dell received. I will never forget this journey, and I hope I never have to walk it again.