

Another Way to Serve My Country



I first experienced MS symptoms in the fall of 2001 while I was stationed at Grand Forks Air Force Base as the senior protestant chaplain. When my primary care manager at Grand Forks suggested MS as a possibility, I started researching the disease, but all of my tests were inconclusive. After being transferred to Patrick Air Force Base in Florida, I was referred to the chief of neurology at the University of Florida Medical School in Gainesville. I took my records, MRI films, x-rays and other documents with me to the appointment. Very shortly after we met in September of 2003 he said, “let’s call this what it is. You have MS.”

Although I am retired from the Air Force, my passion for serving my country has not changed. I’ve simply re-focused my attention towards our elected officials as an advocate. As a chaplain and pastor, I have regularly encountered views different than mine. I expect it. People have different beliefs and cultural norms which govern their lives.

During my last assignment in the USAF, as Staff Chaplain for the Department of Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, it was my task to teach that in the US military, we take an oath to “support and defend the Constitution.” In essence, I wanted people to understand that their own beliefs may have to, in some cases would have to, take a back seat to protecting the rights of another whose beliefs were diametrically opposed to their own. Although there were a multitude of opinions in the room, I helped people understand that we are all ultimately working toward a common goal. This allowed everyone to come to a mutual understanding and overcome the barriers of peaceful resolve.

As an MS activist, I approach my advocacy work in the same way. Republican, democrat or independent, I will work with you to make sure the voices of people living with MS are heard.

One policy priority which receives a great deal of bi-partisan support is MS research: both through the National Institutes of Health and the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP) through the Department of Defense (DOD).

As a veteran, knowing that the CDMRP is administered by the Department of Defense and funded by Congress caught my attention. This program exists because more than 23,000 veterans living with MS receive care through the Veterans Health Administration. Additionally, a 2003 Annals of Neurology study found that 5,345 veterans who served in Vietnam and the first Gulf War have been diagnosed with MS that was deemed “service-connected.”

Because of our advocacy efforts, the MS CDMRP received a \$1 million increase in 2016, resulting in a total of \$6 million. For 2017, the House Appropriations Committee provided \$6 million for MSRP and are working on the 2018 budget. This high-risk, high-reward research is complementary to the basic-science research done at the NIH and the private research funded through the National MS Society. Together, these research arms are working simultaneously to bring us closer to a cure.

[**Join me as an MS activist**](#) and learn more about what you can do to help secure funding for critical MS research.