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## HONORING SERGEANT KEVIN DOWNS, 278TH ARMORED CAVALRY REGIMENT

What does it mean to be a hero today? We each have our own ideas about what act of bravery earns a man or woman that very special privilege --- the honor to be called a hero, to be saluted by friends and neighbors and strangers alike for doing something extraordinary that, at that moment in time, just seemed like the right thing to do.

Today, I am honored to stand before you here, on the floor of the House of the Representatives, to tell you and all of America about someone I consider a true hero. This young man has inspired me and so many others around the world who have heard his story of courage and patriotism.

On August 13th, 2005, Specialist Kevin Downs of Kingston Springs, Tennessee was traveling in a Humvee near the city of Tuz in northeastern Iraq with three other members of the 278 th Armored Cavalry Regiment. The Humvee was struck by four explosive devices. Kevin was blown 60 feet. He lost both legs, his arm was broken, he was severely burned over 60 percent of his body, including burns to his eyes, throat and lungs. He was 20 years old and had been in Iraq eight months.

Specialist Downs was the only survivor of the IED attack that day. His three friends, crewmates and fellow Tennesseans were killed that day: 22-year-old Gary Lee Reese of Ashland City, 35-year-old Staff Sgt. Asbury "Fred" Hawn, Jr of Lebanon and 30-year-old Shannon D. Taylor of Smithville.

Specialist Downs was first evacuated to a hospital in Germany where his injuries were stabilized. As his father Joe told friends and reporters at the time: "The young man is fighting and battling, and he's going to make it." Joe and Catherine Downs remained at his bedside during his time in the ICU in Germany.

As soon as possible, Kevin was transferred to a burn unit at the Brooke Army Medical Center in Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. But the challenges were far from over. Since his injuries almost one year ago, Kevin has endured more surgeries than his family can even count --- two in the last ten days. He is able to get around using a wheelchair today, his father reports. And he is learning to maneuver using his prosthesis. His father adds that any time he and Catherine fall into the habit of saying they'll do something for him, Kevin politely but firmly refuses saying, no, he wants to do it for himself.

Kevin's determination and positive outlook have touched the hearts of so many. Thanks to local news coverage of his challenges, Kevin has received thousands of letters of support from folks around the world. His resolve and bravery as he faces the latest surgeries and treatment have made him a true hero to all of us in Tennessee.

We had all hoped Kevin would be able to join us this July 4th for the annual Independence Day Parade in Pegram. He's doing great, his family reports, but it looks like his treatment is going to keep him in Texas just a little longer. But Kevin is going to be the Grand Marshall of the parade anyway. His parents will be there in his place on the 4th --- and we all look forward to the day when we get to welcome Kevin back home to Tennessee and have the chance to thank him personally for his service to our country and congratulate him on his recent promotion to sergeant.

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Jim Cooper

Member of Congress