



## From the AUXILIARY NATIONAL COMMANDER WILLIAM CRAIG JOHNIKEN

### He may be a caregiver, too

**W**e've often heard that women are the fastest-growing population of military recruits and veterans, but we may sometimes lose sight of what that means to husbands, fathers and brothers who comprise their support system.

This is obviously an issue that hits home for me. In my immediate family, the paradigm or stereotypical "norm" associated with military caregiving is reversed.

My wife served in the armed forces and is a disabled veteran. The responsibility of supporting my veteran inevitably falls to me, and I'm far from alone.

The 2017 DAV Veteran Family Caregiver Survey found that about 25 percent of total military caregivers are male. It's not hard to imagine that this number will increase as the number of women in the armed forces continues to rise and their roles expand into other jobs previously open only to men.

DAV's recently published *America's Unsung Heroes: Challenges and Inequities Facing Veteran Caregivers* includes the story of Alexis and Jason Courneen. Alexis was severely injured in the Coast Guard, suffering a traumatic brain injury. She experiences ongoing symptoms such as headaches, memory loss, difficulty concentrating, blurred

vision and angry outbursts that make life challenging. Jason said his wife takes care of herself as best she can, and he "fills in the blanks."

But like many caregivers, Jason does not qualify for benefits such as training, government stipends or respite care,

because Alexis was injured prior to 9/11.

There have been times when Jason has had to choose whether to stay home and care for Alexis or go to work. The majority of caregivers in the DAV survey reported their careers were impacted or limited because of their caregiving, and a study conducted by the

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National Alliance for Caregiving reported 69 percent of military caregivers had to take unpaid time off from work or stop working temporarily. Another 62 percent had to cut their regular work hours, and 47 percent had to retire early or stop working entirely.

Leaving pre-9/11 caregivers behind is nothing short of an injustice, and caregivers of all generations and genders deserve our support. I hope fellow Auxiliary members will join me in visiting DAV CAN (Commander's Action Network) to tell elected leaders where we stand on this issue. It's more than just the right thing to do—it's plain common sense.