

## **Eric Alva's Press Conference Statement - July 8, 2009**

Good morning Ladies and Gentleman thank you for being here. My name is retired Marine Staff Sergeant Eric Alva. Six years ago, on March 21, 2003, I was part of a logistical convoy with 3rd Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines. My unit was part of the first wave of ground troops that entered the country of Iraq from Kuwait to start the ground invasion of Operation Iraqi Freedom. I had been in Iraq no more than three hours, when I stepped on a landmine near the city of Basra suffering life threatening injuries. I had a broken left leg, a broken right arm with severe nerve damage, and a badly injured right leg that doctors had to amputate in order to save my life. I had become the first American service member to be injured in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

It was not until February 28, 2007, that I announced not only to the people of the United States, but to the rest of the world that the first American injured in the Iraq war was a gay Marine. I had decided to be true to myself and my country by coming forward and announcing who I am. My coming forward was to tell the citizens of this country, that as a patriotic American when I went to fight the war on terrorism it was for the rights and freedoms of every single person in the United States, not just selected individuals. That means every single individual regardless of who they are.

I stand here today on two good legs again, with my fellow service members, and a courageous Congressman, Patrick Murphy, to show my support for HR 1283 the Military Readiness Enhancement Act. It is time to let people be judged for their merit, professionalism and their leadership. This is a time that we should not be firing anyone from their job in the United States Armed Forces solely for being gay. One year ago we celebrated the 60 year anniversary of the desegregation of our Armed Forces. At the time, people said it would not work. They were wrong. Now we are facing a similar debate with the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell. We need to end this discrimination in the United States once and for all, and be true to what we mean when we state "with liberty and justice for all."

Just this past weekend, we celebrated 233 years of this country's independence. As a gay man, a retired decorated Marine, a husband to my partner Darrell, and as an American citizen, when will individuals such as myself, have their full independence? I say the time is now, let people serve their nation, let people live where they want, love who they want, and give them their full independence as it should be when we celebrate this country's freedom.