

struggles of the Vietnam War generation—and the ensuing controversy over how many of its veterans did or did not commit suicide in its wake—why is there today no known national registry where Afghanistan and Iraq veteran suicide data is being collected? How can we ascertain reintegration problems—if any exist—if we are not proactive in seeking them out?

As late as May 2007, Department of Veterans Affairs spokeswoman Karen Fedele told the Washington Post that there was no attempt to gather Afghanistan and Iraq veteran suicide incidents. “We don’t keep that data,” she said. “I’m told that somebody here is going to do an analysis, but there just is nothing right now.”

Meanwhile, the Army reported its suicide rate in 2006 rose to 17.3 per 100,000 troops, the highest in 26 years of keeping such records. At long last, the Associated Press revealed that the VA is finally conducting preliminary research. They’ve tracked at least 283 OEF/OIF veteran suicides through the end of 2005, nearly double the rate of the additional 147 suicides reported by the DoD’s Defense Manpower Data Center.

Looking only at these suicide figures from the VA (283) and the DoD (147), there have been at least 430 Afghanistan and Iraq veteran suicides that have occurred either in the combat zone or stateside following combat deployment. Lost in the VA and DoD counts are those veterans who have returned from their deployments, are still in the military and not yet in the VA system. The DoD says they do not track those incidents, and I assume neither does the VA because these veterans are not yet on their radar.

Yet even with this omission, many of these 430 confirmed suicides are a result of our wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and should—but won’t—be listed with the DoD’s official OEF/OIF death toll of 4,351. It bears mentioning: Currently 10 percent of the overall fatal casualty count of these wars is due to suicide.

Dismissing the issue of veteran suicide in the face of this data is negligent and does nothing to honor the service and sacrifice of our veterans and the families and communities that literally are tasked with supporting them once they return.

Yet, prior to last month’s CBS News investigation, which revealed that 120 veterans of all wars committed suicide every week in 2005 and that 20–24 year old Afghanistan and Iraq veterans are two to four times more likely to commit suicide than their civilian counterparts, the scope of the problem has been largely unknown because no one with proper resources and access to do the compiling of data came forward to do so.

In my written testimony, I’ve included 75 suicides that I and other citizen journalist colleagues have been tracking since September 2005 and which today reside in the ePluribus Media PTSD Timeline.

Offering only a small and incomplete sliver of insight into how some of our returning troops are faring on the home front—especially in light of the fact that at least another 355 incidents could be added among them according to the VA and DoD—I believe that they collectively tell an even greater tale about the failure of us as individuals and as a society to ensure that our returning warriors are cleansed completely from the psychological wounds of war.

They also reflect the failure of our government institutions to protect those who protect us.

While I realize that these distressing stories are the exception and not the rule, to our exceptional military families having to deal with the deterioration of a loved one they thought had safely returned from combat, they are the rule. In 1956, the same year

that my parents fled to this incredible country, the 84th Congress—in the very House that we sit in today—had this to say in a presidential commission report on veterans’ benefits:

“The Government’s obligation is to help veterans overcome special, significant handicaps incurred as a consequence of their military service. The objective should be to return veterans as nearly as possible to the status they would have achieved had they not been in military service . . . and maintaining them and their survivors in circumstances as favorable as those of the rest of the people. . . . War sacrifices should be distributed as equally as possible within our society. This is the basic function of our veterans programs.”

I am not a pedigreed expert or a government official seasoned in testifying before you, but those who are from the GAO and the Congressional Research Department and even the Veterans Administration itself, have sat in this very seat over the years and told you we are falling far short in providing the resources and programs our returning troops and military families need to successfully return to their personal lives following their service to the nation.

To those who resist hearing the cold hard truth of where we are today, I’d like to say: The time is here to stop fighting the data, and to start fighting for our troops.

This is America. We can do better. We must do better.

HONORING RETIRING TOWN OF BOSTON COUNCILMAN BRIEN HOPKINS

HON. BRIAN HIGGINS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 13, 2007

Mr. HIGGINS. Madam Speaker, I am pleased today to honor the accomplishments of Boston Town Councilman Brien Hopkins.

Throughout Brien’s service on the Town Board, he exemplified the term “public servant.” Brien’s commitment to Boston was manifest, and his desire to see his town reach the very highest level possible served his constituents admirably.

Our community owes Brien a debt of gratitude for his tireless dedication to make Boston a better place to live, work and raise a family. While his work on the town board will conclude on January 1 of next year, the legacy he leaves behind will endure for a long time to come.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank you for this opportunity to honor Brien’s service, and please join me in wishing Brien and his family the very best in the months and years to come.

THE INTRODUCTION OF A HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION TO RECOGNIZE THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE U.S. ARMY RESERVE

HON. STEVE BUYER

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 13, 2007

Mr. BUYER. Madam Speaker, I am honored today to join with over 230 of my colleagues from both sides of the aisle to introduce this

joint resolution that recognizes the sizable impact and contribution that the members of the Army Reserve have had on this great Nation throughout its 100-year history.

This organization has a rich history of dedicated service and sacrifice. From its inception as a corps of medical officers on April 23, 1908, to its initial call-up, charged with running down the bandit “Pancho” Villa, to the challenges that the doughboys faced in World War I, to the bloody battles fought during World War II on the beaches of the Pacific to those of Normandy, to the hills of the war in Korea, and to the sands of the Persian Gulf, the Army Reserve has always rode to the sound of the guns and answered the Nation’s call in its times of need, around the world, without hesitation, living their creed: Duty, Honor, Country.

Today, these soldiers and their loved ones shoulder a greater share of the burden than at anytime in our Nation’s history. Since September 11, 2001, more than 177,000 Army Reserve Soldiers have been mobilized or deployed in support of the Global War on Terrorism. At any given time, more than 20,000 Army Reserve Soldiers are deployed to no fewer than 18 countries around the world. Their efforts will ensure that America’s vital national security interests will continue to be fulfilled and that our homeland remains protected. I am proud to be counted among their ranks.

This resolution represents an opportunity for Congress to recognize the incredible history of service, sacrifice, and accomplishment of those soldiers who have served in the Army Reserve since its inception. Through war and peace citizen soldiers have contributed so much to answer the Nation’s call to ensure that liberty endures. Please join me in celebrating that heritage and recognizing their proud history by supporting this resolution.

RECOGNIZING PHILIPPE CRAS OF KINGWOOD, TEXAS

HON. TED POE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 13, 2007

Mr. POE. Madam Speaker, few people symbolize the American Dream more than Philippe Cras of Kingwood, Texas. From foreign exchange student to proud American citizen, his life is an inspirational tale of making the most of the vast opportunities available in the United States and giving back to local communities after achieving great success.

Philippe is originally from Belgium and arrived in the United States in 1977 as an exchange student sponsored by a Rotary Club. After attending community college in Oregon, he returned to his home country and later accepted a position with a company in the United States. He and his wife, Mieke, eventually settled in Kingwood, Texas. Philippe and Mieke love the United States and wanted nothing more than to become citizens of our great country. They did achieve this goal.

Later, Philippe purchased property in Kingwood and began building his hotel, Homewood Suites. In June of 2000, the hotel opened its doors combining European style with Southern hospitality for a unique lodging experience.

Philippe is known in the community for many things such as his breakfast which features Belgian waffles that are made in the

shape of Texas. He has also become popular as a cornerstone for community service.

After living in the U.S. for a while, he became frustrated with the fact that voter turnout in American elections was so low. Because of this, he hosted a voter registration drive at his hotel. To encourage residents to participate, he offered a free breakfast for registering.

Philippe is extremely active as this year's president of the Humble Intercontinental Rotary and has been named Rotarian of the Year on occasion. He is especially fond of the Rotary's student exchange program which inspired him as a high school student to move to the United States. His life was forever changed by the impact of Rotary International and he takes great pride in giving back to the organization.

With a heart as big as Texas, Philippe has been a Good Samaritan for many years to many people. After Hurricane Rita hit East Texas, Philippe opened his conference room for storm evacuees, fed them and provided mattresses for them to sleep on.

Philippe is one of the first people to volunteer his assistance and resources if a local nonprofit organization needs help. He has collected thousands of toys for Toys for Tots. He is a major sponsor of the annual tradition known as Fill the Bus which encourages residents to donate school supplies for children. He gave out free breakfast and one-night stays at this hotel for those that donated supplies. The event literally fills a school bus with supplies for children at Humble ISD.

His largest contribution to Humble ISD was a \$100,000 grant in hotel services. The grant saves the district money on lodging, catering and other services which allows more school resources to be spent on education instead of expenses. There are far too many examples of Philippe's humble generosity and philanthropy to list. His personal impact in the community has touched thousands of lives and residents in Kingwood, Humble and the surrounding areas. We are forever grateful for his efforts.

Today, I salute Philippe Cras for his contributions to the community, warm hospitality and for making the eternal flame of the American Dream burn brighter each day. His life is an inspiration to us all to challenge ourselves to be better citizens for the sake of our communities.

And that's just the way it is.

YOUTH VIOLENCE

HON. STEPHANIE TUBBS JONES

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 13, 2007

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. Madam Speaker, we are at a critical juncture in our nation as we attempt to find solutions to the growing scourge of youth violence. In October of this year a student shot four others and eventually himself at SuccessTech Academy in my congressional district in Cleveland. Earlier this year Seung-Hui Cho, a Virginia Tech student who in April killed 32 students and faculty before shooting himself to death. And most recently, a teenager with an assault rifle opens fire on holiday shoppers in a department store in middle America.

Over the past ten years more than 60 shooting incidents have occurred in our na-

tion's schools. These incidents have occurred all over the country. While some thought Columbine was an aberration, it has become clear that this is a serious and growing problem in our country that must be addressed.

It is important to point out that in the late 80's and early 90's when overall crime was going down, youth and young adult arrest rates were increasing.

We must ask ourselves why. What makes a 14-year old feel so disengaged from society that he wants to shoot others and himself? When do we stop allowing the broad distribution of firearms under cover of the 2nd Amendment right to bear arms? When do we start to recognize that youth with mental illnesses must be treated as at-risk? Where is the breakdown in the moral fabric that used to hold our society together?

America is looking to Congress to come up with comprehensive solutions. We must begin to deal with this problem on three levels: in the community, within our families and on an individual level.

As adults, we must take a greater interest in the lives of our children. When I was a child, not only were my parents looking out for me, but the entire neighborhood served as my surrogate mothers and fathers. If I was out in the street doing something I wasn't supposed to, not only would I get chastised by my parents, but everyone in the community would get on my case. At the time it may have seemed harsh, but I now realize it was done out of love.

We must take the same approach with our children today. Many of the children who committed these heinous acts showed signs of emotional disturbance prior to the incident. I have to wonder if we as adults and even their peers in school were paying closer attention, could these tragedies have been prevented.

It is time for us as members of Congress to take a serious look at this issue and determine how we can provide support to parents, teachers and our communities as a whole in ending the rampant youth violence that has become so prevalent in our society.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. BILL SHUSTER

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 13, 2007

Mr. SHUSTER. Madam Speaker, on rollcall No. 1155, on the motion to suspend the rules and pass H.R. 3985, the Over-the-Road Bus Transportation Accessibility Act, I was not present. Had I been present, I would have voted "yes."

CELEBRATING THE RETIREMENT OF MICHAEL K. WHEELER FROM THE JOHN DINGELL VA MEDICAL CENTER, DETROIT, MICHIGAN

HON. JOHN D. DINGELL

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 13, 2007

Mr. DINGELL. Madam Speaker, I rise today in honor of Michael K. Wheeler, who is retiring on January 3, 2008, as Director of the John

Dingell VA Medical Center in Detroit. Mr. Wheeler's career is marked by numerous hospital administration roles and a dedication to our men and women who have served in the Armed Forces.

Mr. Wheeler was born in Detroit and moved to Canton, Ohio, when he was a teenager. He received a BS in business administration from the University of Dayton and an MA in hospital administration from Xavier University in Cincinnati. Mr. Wheeler began his career as a Hospital Administration Specialist in the U.S. Air Force and has served in an impressive number of VA Medical Centers, including Durham, North Carolina; Portland, Oregon; Prescott, Arizona; Coatesville, Pennsylvania; Cleveland, Ohio; and Dayton, Ohio. Prior to assuming the position of Director of the John Dingell VAMC, Mr. Wheeler was the Medical Center Director of the VAMC Battle Creek, Michigan. Additionally, Mr. Wheeler has conducted seminars in postgraduate education in management principles, strategic planning, and quality assurance for the VA, Duke University, and the American College of Health Care Executives.

Undoubtedly, Mr. Wheeler was more than prepared when he began his tenure at the John Dingell VAMC in 2001. There, he oversees all operations of the 108 bed primary, secondary, and tertiary care medical center which provides acute medical, surgical, psychiatric, and other inpatient care as well as both primary and specialized outpatient services, including substance abuse, among others. His job necessitates flexibility and strong decisionmaking abilities.

Mr. Wheeler is a patriot and a role model for us all. His colleagues and associates know him as an approachable, humorous, and very hard-working Director. I am proud to call him a friend. The John Dingell VAMC has been lucky to have him for these past 6 years. Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring Mr. Wheeler for his dedication to the VA and to the men and women who have served our country. I wish him well as he moves on to new adventures.

RECOGNIZING LCPL JOSHUA BLEILL

HON. MIKE PENCE

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 13, 2007

Mr. PENCE. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize Lance Corporal Joshua Bleill, a veteran of the Iraq War, a fine Marine and a bright light to many of us. I have had the privilege of meeting this impressive young man and I am honored to enter the following poem written by Burt Caswell of the Capitol Guide Service into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

A BRIGHT LIGHT

A . . .
A Bright Light!
Shining, ever into that night!
Day and Night . . .

A . . .
A Shining Star!
A hero, who will go far!
Who with his fine heart, stands way above
par!
Who to our world . . .
So shows what is right!