

VETERAN SUICIDE PREVENTION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Arizona (Ms. SINEMA) for 30 minutes.

Ms. SINEMA. Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to open the Special Order this evening with my colleague and friend, Congressman DAN BENISHEK of Michigan.

We have some colleagues who are joining us here this evening to continue the discussion we have been enjoying for the last hour of talking about the scourge of veteran suicides and how to stop this scourge.

We know that there are brave whistleblowers around this country who have told us and the Nation about the problems at the VA.

If it weren't for brave whistleblowers, we may not have learned about the tragedies at my VA, the Phoenix VA, and we could have lost even more lives than we have lost already.

In order for the VA to change, it has to put its veterans first and change the culture. We believe that VA employees must continue to speak up and speak out.

Brandon Coleman, a Marine Corps veteran, has seen firsthand the important role the VA can play in helping veterans. A decade ago he received help from a dedicated VA counselor, who helped him overcome substance abuse issues and get his life back on track.

Wanting to help his fellow veterans, Brandon began working as an addiction counselor with the Phoenix VA in 2009.

In January of this year, Brandon approached his supervisor after, over the course of a single week, five suicidal veterans walked out of the Phoenix VA hospital without getting the help they needed from the emergency room.

After coming forward with his concerns about how the VA handled suicidal patients, Brandon was placed on administrative leave for adverse behavior and his program was shut down.

Mr. Speaker, no one should fear the risk of losing his or her job for speaking out. That is why we introduced the VA Accountability Act, a bipartisan bill to hold poor-performing employees accountable and to increase protections for whistleblowers.

Empowering whistleblowers helps our veterans and their families get the answers they deserve. The VA must respond to this challenge with a culture of accountability that protects veterans, not its own bureaucracy.

Brandon testified before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee earlier this week on improving accountability within the VA. He is committed to fixing the VA to ensure that all veterans get the same help that he got.

I would like to take some time now to turn the podium over to the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. RUSSELL).

Mr. RUSSELL. I thank the Congresswoman.

Mr. Speaker, it is a serious issue that our Nation faces when we imagine the

sacrifice that our veterans make only to see them become casualties in a battle with the mind.

Those of us who have borne the burden of battle carry the weight of that burden the rest of our lives. As a warrior, I have seen the worst things that human beings can do to one another. I have had to take human life. I have had to watch fellow warriors lose theirs. I have caressed wounded brothers as they have been bleeding.

We recall these things and carry these things, and, as warriors, we attempt to process it all when we come home. When we do come home, others attempt to interact with us not quite knowing how that interaction should play out or how to treat the Americans we really are.

So, as we address this issue of veteran suicide and as we stand here to speak in support of the many good measures that we have heard today, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to provide a couple of things worth noting with which we could reach out to the community at large, to our States, to all of America.

For the population that deals with returning battle veterans, purpose matters. We don't want to come home as victims. We don't want to be put in some special class.

We have maintained the stresses of battle, and we have fought our Nation's wars, but purpose matters as we come home.

If that purpose is somehow denied us because of fear of capacity or fear of being able to interact with other Americans in employment or in whatever it is that we put our hand to, then we will miss a great opportunity early on to engage returning veterans in things that will help them heal.

Secondly, we should treat our returning veterans as the Americans they really are. We somehow unintendedly imagine them as damaged goods, or maybe they have had something happen to them that does not make them some like we are. That is a mistake.

Thirdly, when we look at the stresses of battle and how they shape our lives, we must remember this, that post-traumatic stress is treatable. As we deal with those who have faced battle as they struggle through this, it is important to note that the returning warrior has not lost his mind or her mind. It is treatable.

Mr. Speaker, one can easily relate when you think about, in my home State, maybe surviving a tornado or maybe, across America, being in a horrific car accident or losing a loved one in some capacity.

It creates stress on the human being, yet no one in that scenario would say, "Well, they have been through quite a lot, so I am not sure that they can engage with the public anymore and be employed" or, "I am not sure they will be able to handle the daily stresses."

Instead, we look at them, and we realize that these are life-altering experiences, whether it be through a car acci-

dent or a tornado, and we say, "Wow, that is terrible, but they have really bounced back, and they have done a good job of recovering." We need to look at it in the same capacity.

I am no physician, but I am a warrior who has come home. For the warrior, as he or she does come home, Mr. Speaker, we must urge all of our warriors, especially as they face insurmountable pressure about "Does life have a purpose?" to not live in isolation, and we must understand that the adrenalin of survival at our peak in battle, which is all around us—every sense alive to protect us as we survive—physiologically doesn't instantly change when we come home.

Those levels of adrenalin stay, and we crave them. That is why your returning veteran may ride his motorcycle at 120 miles an hour or pursue a dangerous activity. As the warrior processes it, he must understand as well that it takes time to abate that and to adjust.

I also want to point out, Mr. Speaker, that our returning veterans should band together with their fellow warriors. Above all, don't quit. Only we can take ourselves out of that fight.

To all of us, I think it is best to recall what Solomon tells us in Ecclesiastes in that two are better than one because they have good reward for their labor, for, if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falls, for he does not have another to help him up.

Again, if two lie together, then they have heat. But how can one be warm alone? And if one prevails against him, two shall withstand him, and a three-fold cord is not quickly broken.

As we attempt here in government to bind up the wounds, we must also realize it is not the government's sole responsibility. As an American community, we need to bind together as those wounds are bound up to heal.

Ms. SINEMA. Thank you so much, Representative RUSSELL, for your thoughts and your participation.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. LAMBORN).

Thank you for being here this evening.

Mr. LAMBORN. I want to thank my colleagues Representative SINEMA and Representative BENISHEK for their leadership on this issue today and for organizing this time together.

I also want to thank Representative RUSSELL for his hard-earned insights that he has shared with us.

Mr. Speaker, it is critical that we raise awareness for veteran suicide prevention. Unfortunately, this much-needed awareness comes too late for one of my Colorado Springs families.

I would like to tell you the story of Noah, a former marine, who served with honor in Iraq in 2009 and in Afghanistan in 2011. I will not use his last name, but his parents have offered the use of his picture.

After leaving the Marine Corps, Noah began working on a business degree at

the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, and started his own online business.

Now, Noah comes from a military family, his dad having honorably served for 23 years. He chose to put off college so that he could serve this great Nation.

Unfortunately, his parents are appalled by the care their son did not receive from the VA. They believe their son would still be alive had he received better care. Noah was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and received a 50 percent disability rating due to PTSD.

On April 2 of this year, he went to the Colorado Springs VA clinic, where medical notes from his visit state that he had had suicidal thoughts.

Noah was prescribed a psychotropic drug and was sent on his way. He was not referred for suicide prevention; he was not offered counseling; and there was no follow-up from the VA.

He went missing on May 4 and was found dead from an apparent suicide on May 12 of this year. As you can imagine, his family is devastated. They are asking a lot of serious questions.

I had the opportunity to ask some of their questions on their behalf during a June 10 hearing by the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations.

During the hearing, two top-level VA officials stated that they would personally look into the case and "make sure this family had been reached out to directly."

However, a month after the hearing, no contact had been made, and my office had to once again engage the VA on behalf of this grieving family.

The VA has since stated that Noah should have been seen within 2 weeks of his medical appointment and that they are modifying their procedures to, hopefully, make sure this doesn't happen in the future.

It should not take the death of a marine to get procedures right in regards to suicide prevention. We owe it to our veterans to get it right the first time.

Hopefully, this Special Order and the added awareness of veteran suicide will help prevent another tragedy like Noah's.

Ms. SINEMA. Thank you, Congressman LAMBORN, for your contribution this evening.

Mr. Speaker, before we close this evening, I yield to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. BENISHEK), my friend, who has been gracious to cohost our Special Orders this evening.

Mr. BENISHEK. Yes. It was great. It was a wonderful Special Order this evening.

I want to thank all of my colleagues who took the time to come down and talk about this serious issue that faces our country.

Mr. LAMBORN discusses a case of suicide that he is very familiar with in his district. That story moves each and every one of us, and it is emblematic of the 22 suicides that occur every day amongst our veterans.

There are stories as moving as this one and as tragic as this one as Mr. LAMBORN brings up the fact that this patient was seen at the VA and was not helped at the VA.

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We need to make sure that the Veterans Administration and this administration puts our veterans not on the back burner as something that is ongoing, but make this a crisis. This is an emergency.

This needs to be dealt with now not with reassurances from bureaucrats that it is all going to be better or "We are changing our policies." They have been changing their policies for a long time and nothing has happened. This needs to be an emergency response.

As friends and family members of our veterans and those serving our country, there are some things that we can do. We can work to recognize the symptoms that could indicate serious problems and identify where and how to get assistance when we may need it.

To all veterans struggling with whether to take your own life, know that there is no shame in asking for help. You are not broken, and God has not forgotten you.

You have volunteered to go to war for us, and we have failed to provide you adequate support when you have returned home. That is changing. I beg you to reach out to your local VA, your veterans center, your veterans service organization, or your Congressman to ask for help.

I mean, I had two calls today on my cell phone, which I give my number out freely, from veterans that did not get appropriate help at the VA, and I refer them to my staff to get the ball rolling, get moving.

Together we can begin to turn the tide on veterans' suicide. Everyone, though, can help fight this epidemic and be there for those that were there for us.

I thank my colleague from Arizona (Ms. SINEMA) for closing this Special Order hour for us.

Ms. SINEMA. Thank you so much, Congressman BENISHEK.

Before we close, we have one more person who has joined us.

I yield to the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. COFFMAN).

Mr. COFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to voice my unrelenting support for our Nation's veterans who are suffering, often silently, with depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and profound emotional pain. It is absolutely vital that we, as a Nation, address the crisis of veteran suicide.

As a Marine Corps combat veteran, I can tell you firsthand that returning home to civilian life can be a difficult transition. Many troops used to the constant daily support of their comrades come home feeling isolated and alone. Many find themselves needing help that too often isn't there.

Some units are hit particularly hard, like the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine

Regiment, a group that saw intense combat in Afghanistan and has continued to suffer casualties to suicide years after they have returned. 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines, has seen a suicide rate 14 times higher than that of all other Americans.

It is essential that, when our men and women in uniform return to the civilian world and need to reach out for help, somebody reaches back.

We need to ensure that veterans get the mental health care they need, when they need it, not after waiting weeks or months for an appointment.

We need to ensure that veterans who need medication get it and veterans who don't need medication aren't unnecessarily prescribed drugs with volatile side effects.

We need to ensure that, when a veteran calls the VA's Veterans Crisis Line, somebody is available on the other end to listen.

But I don't believe this is a problem that begins and ends with the Department of Defense or the Department of Veterans Affairs. Veterans are in all of our communities, our schools, our places of worship, and our social clubs. All Americans should be willing to lend a hand when a veteran may be suffering silently.

I share the sentiment expressed by VA Secretary McDonald earlier this year, and I know it is a statement in which my colleagues on both sides of the aisle would uniformly agree: "Losing just one veteran to suicide is one veteran too many."

Ms. SINEMA. Mr. Speaker and Members, before I close with the closing statements, I want to take a moment and honor and thank Congressman BENISHEK not just for the work he has done tonight or the work he has done on the Veterans Committee, but for the great work he has done in Congress for the last three terms.

We are sad that you are retiring. We will miss you. But we have one more chance to do this Special Order again next year, and I look forward to that time. So thank you for your help and for your service.

Congressman BENISHEK has not just been a partner to me in the work that we have been doing to help and support veterans, he has been a leader in the Veterans Committee and in his conference and in this House of Representatives.

I know, when he leaves this body, he will continue to be a shining light for veterans around this country. Thank you, Congressman.

I want to close with a story about a veteran in my district. We recently received a call from David, a constituent of mine who is an Army veteran and a survivor of two suicide attempts.

David told us: My mind was plagued with feelings that my parents and siblings would be better off without me because of who I had become as a person. I felt savage and inhuman. No matter what good I did, I couldn't face going back to a normal existence. I had never felt more alone in my life.

Through much time and assistance from organizations like the Wounded Warrior Project and mental and physical rehabilitation programs, David gained a new mission in life. He is helping his fellow veterans navigate a daunting system and reintegrate back into civilian life.

David wants his fellow warriors to understand that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

His mission of supporting veterans led David to Rally Point, a Phoenix nonprofit veteran service organization working to assist veterans in crisis.

Rally Point employs veterans like David who understand the unique needs of fellow veterans, servicemembers, and their families. These are the kinds of solutions we need to ensure that no veteran ever feels like he or she has nowhere to turn.

We have made some progress. In February of this year, the President signed the Clay Hunt SAV Act into law, an important step toward improving mental health services for veterans and their families.

This bipartisan legislation requires annual third-party evaluations of the VA's mental healthcare and suicide prevention programs to determine which programs are successful and to recommend improvements.

It also requires collaboration on suicide prevention efforts between the VA and nonprofit mental health organizations, and it establishes a pilot program using peer support and community outreach to assist veterans transitions from Active Duty.

We cannot leave our heroes to fight their toughest battles alone.

Thank you again to all of our colleagues who joined us this evening. Our thoughts are with all the families who have lost a loved one to suicide. Each of us can do something to raise awareness, to be that light for a struggling veteran in our community.

Businesses can display signs to let veterans know that help is always available. Mental health professionals can volunteer with organizations like Give an Hour to provide free counseling to veterans and their families. We can all learn to recognize the signs of crisis by visiting veteranscrisisline.net and reaching out to the vets in our life.

Here in Congress, we can do more. We need a VA that provides real and meaningful help to veterans in need that puts veterans first and works aggressively with community providers to improve the quality and accessibility of care.

We need a VA that is transparent and open to restore the trust and credibility it has lost. We, who enjoy freedom every day thanks to the sacrifices of our military servicemembers, must all step up to end the epidemic of veteran suicide.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. JONES (at the request of Mr. McCARTHY) for today and the balance of the week on account of personal reasons.

Mr. HUDSON (at the request of Mr. McCARTHY) for today on account of family reasons.

Ms. MCCOLLUM (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today and the balance of the week on account of a family event.

PUBLICATION OF COMMITTEE RULES

RULES OF THE COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS FOR THE 114TH CONGRESS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS,
Washington, DC, September 24, 2015.

Hon. JOHN BOEHNER,

The Speaker of the House, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR SPEAKER BOEHNER: Pursuant to clause 2(a)(2) of House Rule XI, I hereby submit the Rules of the Committee on Small Business for publication in the Congressional Record. The Rules were adopted by the Committee in its organizational meeting.

Sincerely,

STEVE CHABOT,
Chairman.

1. GENERAL PROVISIONS

The Rules of the House of Representatives, in total (but especially with respect to the operations of committees Rule X, cl. 1(q), cl. 2, cl. 3(1), and Rule XI) are the rules of the Committee on Small Business to the extent applicable and are incorporated by reference. Each Subcommittee of the Committee on Small Business ("the Committee") is a part of the Committee and is subject to the authority and direction of the Committee, and to the rules of the House and the rules adopted herein to the extent applicable.

2. REFERRAL OF BILLS BY THE CHAIR

The Chair will retain consideration of all legislation referred to the Committee by the Speaker. No action will be required of a Subcommittee before legislation is considered for report by the Committee. Subcommittee chairs, pursuant to the rules set out herein, may hold hearings on any bill referred to the Committee.

3. DATE OF MEETING

The regular meeting date of the Committee shall be the second Wednesday of every month when the House is in session. The Chair may dispense with the meeting of the Committee, if in the sole discretion of the Chair, there is no need for such meeting. Additional meetings may be called as deemed necessary by the Chair or at the request of the majority Members of the Committee pursuant to Rule XI, cl. 2(c) of the rules of the House.

At least 3 days notice of such an additional meeting shall be given unless the Chair, with the concurrence of the Ranking Minority Member, determines that there is good cause to call the meeting on less notice or upon a vote by a majority of the Committee (a quorum being present). To the extent possible, the three days shall be counted from the 72 hours before the time of the meeting. Announcements of the meeting shall be published promptly in the Daily Digest and made publicly available in electronic form.

The determination of the business to be considered at each meeting shall be made by the Chair subject to limitations set forth in House Rule XI, cl. 2(c).

The Chair shall provide to each Member of the Committee, to the extent practicable, at least 48 hours in advance of a meeting, a

copy of the bill, resolution, report or other item to be considered at the meeting, but no later than 24 hours before the meeting. Such material also shall be made available to the public at least 24 hours in advance in electronic form.

The rules for notice and meetings as set forth in Rule 3 of these Rules shall not apply to special and emergency meetings. Clause 2(c)(2) of Rule XI and clause 2(g)(3)(A) of Rule XI of the Rules of the House, as applicable, shall apply to such meetings.

A record vote of the Committee shall be provided on any question before the Committee upon the request of any Member of the Committee. A record of the vote of each Member of the Committee on a matter before the Committee shall be available in electronic form within 48 hours of such record vote, and, with respect to any roll call vote on any motion to amend or report, shall be included in the report of the Committee showing the total number of votes cast for and against and the names of those Members voting for and against.

The Chair of the Committee shall, not later than 24 hours after consideration of a bill, resolution, report or other item cause the text of the reported item and any amendment adopted thereto to be made publicly available in electronic form.

4. ANNOUNCEMENT OF HEARINGS

Public announcement of the date, place, and subject matter of any hearing to be conducted by the Committee shall be made no later than 7 calendar days before the commencement of the hearing. To the extent possible, the seven days shall be counted from 168 hours before the time of the Committee's hearing.

The Chair, with the concurrence of the Ranking Minority Member, or upon a vote by the majority of the Committee (a quorum being present), may authorize a hearing to commence on less than 7 calendar days notice.

A. Witness Lists

Unless the Chair determines it is impracticable to do so, the Committee shall make a tentative witness list available at the time it makes the public announcement of the hearing. If a tentative witness list is not made available at the time of the announcement of the hearing, such witness list shall be made available as soon as practicable after such announcement is made. A final witness list shall be issued by the Committee no later than 48 hours prior to the commencement of the hearing.

B. Material for the Hearing

The Chair shall provide to all Members of the Committee, as soon as practicable after the announcement of the hearing, a memorandum explaining the subject matter of the hearing and any official reports from departments and agencies on the subject matter of the hearing. Such material shall be made available to all Members of the Committee no later than 48 hours before the commencement of the hearing unless the Chair, after consultation with the Ranking Minority Member, determines that certain reports from departments or agencies should not be made available prior to the commencement of the hearing. Material provided by the Chair to all Members, whether provided prior to or at the hearing, shall be placed on the Committee website no later than 48 hours after the commencement of the hearing unless such material contains sensitive or classified information in which case such material shall be handled pursuant to Rule 15 of the Committee's Rules.

5. MEETINGS AND HEARINGS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

A. Meetings

Each meeting of the Committee or its Subcommittees for the transaction of business,