

only to have this administration's officials block us at every turn.

Despite the scientific proof—the incontrovertible science that these conditions are linked to Agent Orange—and despite more than 83,000 veterans who suffer from these conditions, the Trump administration's VA resisted and refused to acknowledge the connection.

I look forward to voting to add bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and Parkinsonism to the list of Agent Orange presumptives. One condition in our bill, hypertension, was not included in this NDAA amendment, but I am committed to adding it during conference. It is supported by the science as a condition linked to Agent Orange.

The Trump administration says it doesn't want to spend the money to cover the four conditions in this bill, but when we send people to war, we make a commitment. We make a commitment, and we accept an obligation to treat them, no matter what the cost, no matter what the cause of their service-related injuries are when the science and the facts support it. Facts are stubborn things, as many have said. To the veterans in Connecticut and nationwide, I will never stop fighting to get good healthcare for our veterans. I know this issue is bipartisan in its support.

I look forward to voting in favor of the fiscal year 2021 NDAA, but I also think our colleagues must recognize that military spending alone does not guarantee our national security. These weapons platforms and the hardware that we produce does not constitute, alone, our national defense. It is the quality of our people, whether they are in the supply chain or the defense establishment or our troops on the ground or in the air or at sea. To recruit and train the best possible military, we need to have a strong non-military infrastructure. Education, healthcare, housing—our national defense includes those essential components.

So I believe that we must scrutinize this budget with a view to reducing any expenditures that are unnecessary.

I will state as a matter of principle that when we vote on this NDAA, I will be supportive of amendments that might potentially achieve more equity and effectiveness in the way we make commitments in support of our national defense. We must interpret as broadly as is necessary how that defense must be supported.

It is not alone the money in this NDAA; it is also what we commit to racial justice in this country; the quality of our policing and our education, which should not depend on a young person's ZIP Code; the quality of our healthcare, which right now has racial disparities that are inexcusable; housing that often results from redlining; and protections in the workplace, which could be achieved by a fairer, more effective use of OSHA.

The quality of our society and our projection of power abroad depend on

our quality of life and the quality of services that we provide on education, healthcare, housing, and all of the other infrastructure, including transportation. We need to consider those factors and do what is necessary to assure that our warfighters and our military never have a fair fight, that they always predominate on the battlefield. We must protect our veterans to whom we make the commitment that we will always have their backs when they come home.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 643.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The clerk will report the nomination. The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of William Scott Hardy, of Pennsylvania, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Pennsylvania.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of William Scott Hardy, of Pennsylvania, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Pennsylvania.

Mitch McConnell, Chuck Grassley, Cindy Hyde-Smith, Michael B. Enzi, Tim Scott, Marco Rubio, Lamar Alexander, James E. Risch, David Perdue, Bill Cassidy, Pat Roberts, John Cornyn, Lindsey Graham, Thom Tillis, Deb Fischer, Mike Crapo, Kevin Cramer.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call be waived.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

COMMANDER JOHN SCOTT HANNON VETERANS MENTAL HEALTH CARE IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, I am here this evening to discuss a tragic issue that is affecting way too many Americans across the country. This tragedy is mental health and suicide. A majority of Americans are encountering an unprecedented amount of stress due to COVID-19, and resources previously used to help individuals cope are even more limited. What is more concerning is that compounding

stressors and depleted resources increase the likelihood of public health disparities like the one I am discussing today. If there ever were a time to invest in mental health, it is now.

In a recent article from the Journal of the American Medical Association, researchers discussed several risk factors that put our Nation collectively at a higher risk for suicide. These risk factors include economic stress, decreased access to community and religious support systems, lack of access to adequate mental health and suicide prevention services, and social isolation. This has unfortunately caused a severe lack of personal and social connection, which we know to be a protective factor against suicide.

This evening I want to specifically highlight veterans as they face unique risk factors for suicide, in addition to the increased stress around COVID-19. Research illustrates that veterans have a higher rate of suicide and certain mental health conditions than their civilian peers. We know there is not one single explanation or reason for suicide, and there is no one single treatment or prevention strategy.

While post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries are prominent among veterans and are known as an invisible wound of war, we now realize other conditions, such as depression, anxiety, and substance use disorder, also contribute to suicide among veterans and all Americans.

Our veterans are fighting new battles, and the stress caused by COVID-19 has only exacerbated these issues. Just recently, two veterans from different generations, who lived on different coasts and fought in different wars decades apart, died by suicide. One was a 74-year-old veteran who died on the campus of a VA facility in San Diego, and the other was a former Green Beret in Washington, DC. They are two of the 20 veterans who are lost each day to suicide—a number we know as far too great.

The Army recently lost a respected soldier known as "Captain America." Master Sergeant Marckesano fought in Afghanistan, and according to news reports, 30 soldiers from his former unit have died by suicide since their 2009 deployment. Until the end, Master Sergeant Marckesano was encouraging members of his old unit to reach out and talk if they found themselves struggling, telling them "Don't let the valley win." Even soldiers who try to be strong for others find themselves in a circumstance where they don't see another option, and they lose their battle.

Another veteran I want to highlight today who fought a battle with his mental health was Commander John Scott Hannon. Commander Hannon's DD-214 illustrates that he was a decorated Navy SEAL, but he was much more than his service history and the wounds he bore as a result. His family and friends remember him as a passionate mental health advocate for veterans with a gentle heart and a fierce

belief in taking tangible actions to tackle big challenges.

Sadly, Commander Hannon lost his courageous fight with post-traumatic stress, bipolar disorder, and the effects of a traumatic brain injury in February 2018. However, he lives on in the memories of his friends and family and as the namesake of pivotal legislation in the Senate that I am pleased to lead with the Senator from Montana, Mr. TESTER.

For several months now, our committee has been working closely with the VA and the White House to improve upon and advance the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act, S. 785, which will make necessary investments in suicide prevention services, innovative research, and improvements to mental healthcare.

This bill will establish a grant program that requires the VA and the Department of Veterans Affairs to better collaborate with community organizations across the country already serving veterans. This collaboration will result in earlier identification of veterans who are at risk of suicide and will provide the ability to intervene with preventive services. This is a provision championed by my colleague from Arkansas, Senator BOOZMAN. Additionally, this legislation requires the VA to bolster research efforts around brain and mental health conditions, expand upon telehealth partnerships to deliver better care to our veterans in rural areas, allow veterans to take advantage of emerging complimentary and integrative treatments, and so much more.

This bipartisan legislation received a unanimous 17-to-0 vote in the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs earlier this year, and the time to act by the full Senate is now. We should not wait.

The increased risk factors coupled with the negative effects of the pandemic could be a perfect storm for our veterans, as researchers from the American Psychological Association noted in a recent article. With this in mind, I am calling on my colleagues to do our part to make certain that every veteran has access to the lifesaving care and support they need. We need to ensure that every VA medical center is equipped with the proper personnel, evidence-based treatment options, and best research-informed care to fit the needs of each veteran who walks through that hospital door.

For veterans and servicemembers like Commander John Scott Hannon and Master Sergeant Marckesano, we in Congress have the opportunity to take action to let them know they don't have to struggle alone. This legislation will help connect these veterans and our servicemembers to more resources and provide them tools to address challenges related to their service. To my colleagues, we have a significant role and responsibility to combat this struggle, and here, today, we can do our part to make certain that in the end the valley does not win.

In the spirit of this bill's namesake, we must take real and urgent action to tackle this challenge together. As we seek swift action on S. 785 on the Senate floor, I ask my colleagues to join us in our fight against suicide.

Lastly, to the veterans across the country who may hear this message today, who are experiencing thoughts of suicide, I ask you to reach out for help. Call a trusted friend, family member, or reach out to the Veterans Crisis Line. That number is 1-800-273-8255, and then press 1. Again, 1-800-273-8255, followed by pressing 1.

I am pleased to know that in the future, this crisis line will be updated to 9-8-8. This is because the Senate acted on my legislation, along with Senator GARDNER, to designate 9-8-8 as the new national suicide and mental health crisis hotline earlier this year. Last week, the FCC announced they will make this designation operational by July 16, 2022.

Suicide is preventable, and now is the time we take the stand necessary to protect the lives of people who have given so much for our Nation. They have protected us; we need to protect them.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

REMEMBERING JOHN LEWIS

Mrs. LOEFFLER. Madam President, in downtown Atlanta at the corner of Auburn Avenue and Jesse Hill Jr Drive, there is a 65-foot mural of Congressman John Lewis with the lone caption: "Hero."

I personally got to see it yesterday from the Downtown Connector, the major interstate that runs through the heart of Atlanta, as I drove to Hartsfield-Jackson airport. I was struck by the void left by his passing, not only in Georgia, but across our entire country.

When parents teach their children about courage and the fight for freedom and equality, the story of Congressman John Lewis will be told. He dedicated his entire life to pushing America to live up to its promises. He championed nonviolent protests. He stood for community, justice, and love.

Congressman Lewis's story has inspired millions. At just 18, he wrote to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., when he sought to attend the all-White Troy State University. He went on to become a leader in the civil rights movement. He organized sit-ins at segregated lunch counters in Nashville. He was on the buses during the 1961 Freedom Rides. He was the youngest speaker at the 1963 March on Washington. He was brutally beaten while leading peaceful demonstrators across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, AL.

For the last 33 years, he served Georgia in the U.S. House of Representatives, where he was known as "the conscience of Congress." He was also known for his many bipartisan friendships. One of them was with my predecessor, Senator Johnny Isakson, a true

statesman. They shared a powerful moment last year on the House floor when Congressman Lewis embraced him during farewell speeches to the Senator, one of the most touching moments in Congress's recent history.

Sadly, Congressman Lewis was not the only civil rights icon we lost last week. Georgia also lost Reverend C.T. Vivian. Both he and Congressman Lewis were champions of peaceful, non-violent protest. I hope we can honor their legacy by using nonviolent means as we strive toward equality and a more perfect union.

Georgians cannot think of our beloved State without thinking of these and so many other civil rights icons and leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Our Nation is better because of their leadership and their courage. Their legacy will never be forgotten.

May God comfort the Lewis and Vivian families during this incredibly difficult time.

(The remarks of Mrs. LOEFFLER pertaining to the introduction of S. 4238 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mrs. LOEFFLER. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mrs. LOEFFLER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO MAGGIE BLACK

• Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, I would like to take the opportunity to express my appreciation to Maggie for her hard work as an intern in my Cheyenne office. I recognize her efforts and contributions to my office as well as to the State of Wyoming.

Maggie is a native of Cheyenne. She is a student at Christendom College, where she is studying political science and economics. She has demonstrated a strong work ethic, which has made her an invaluable asset to our office. The quality of her work is reflected in her great efforts over the last several months.

I want to thank Maggie for the dedication she has shown while working for me and my staff. It was a pleasure to have her as part of our team. I know she will have continued success with all of her future endeavors. I wish her all my best on her next journey. •