



SUICIDE PREVENTION ACTION NETWORK USA
Opening Minds. Changing Policy. Saving Lives.

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Media Contact:

Melanie Fonder, 202-715-1568
melanie.fonder@dittus.com

All Other Inquiries:

Brian Altman, 202-449-3600
baltman@spanusa.org

SPAN USA Commends Veterans Affairs Committee for Swift Action

House Committee Passes Joshua Omgig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act

Washington, D.C. (February 15, 2007) – Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN USA) today praised the U.S. House Veterans Affairs Committee for unanimously passing the Joshua Omgig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act (H.R. 327) to prevent the incidence of suicide among veterans.

The measure directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to develop and implement a comprehensive program to reduce the incidence of suicide among veterans, would make available 24-hour mental health care for veterans found to be at risk, and develop an outreach and education program for veterans and their families to recognize readjustment problems and promote mental health.

“SPAN USA applauds the House Veterans Affairs Committee for its swift passage of the Joshua Omgig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act. There is certainly no time like the present to focus our country’s attention on the issue of veteran’s mental health care and suicide prevention,” said Jerry Reed, executive director of SPAN USA. “In 2004, veterans accounted for 21 percent of deaths by suicide, even though veterans only make up about 10 percent of the general U.S. population. These tragic deaths encompass veterans ranging in age from 20 to 65 years and older. This age range shows the need for prevention targeted at veterans of current and prior conflicts.”

The bill is named for Joshua Omgig, who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder following an 11-month tour of duty in Iraq, and completed suicide in 2005 at his home in Iowa. Rep. Leonard Boswell, the sponsor of the legislation, noted, “I’m very disturbed by the number of young veterans who take their lives after serving in combat. One life lost to suicide is one too many. We treat their physical injuries, now it is time to treat the wounds that are not visible. I’m very pleased that the Joshua Omgig Suicide Prevention bill was passed in committee. This is a good first step, and I’m looking forward when it passes the full House.”

More than 31,000 people die by suicide each year in the United States and approximately 1.4 million attempt suicide. In contrast, fewer than 20,000 die by homicide or from HIV/AIDS. Two-thirds of those who die by suicide are not receiving treatment at the time of their death.

Suicides cost the U.S. \$13 billion in lost earnings each year, and suicide attempts requiring hospitalization cost the United States \$3.8 billion per year. The emotional costs to countless families and communities are incalculable.

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SPAN USA is the nation’s only suicide prevention organization dedicated to leveraging grassroots support among suicide survivors and others to advance public policies that prevent suicide. Since its founding in 1996, SPAN USA has led the drive to make suicide a public health priority by building political will and calling for the development and implementation of a national strategy for suicide prevention. Using its extensive grassroots network of survivors and advocates, SPAN USA has actively promoted the cause on Capitol Hill and in state legislatures. For more information, please visit www.spanusa.org.