



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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**SPAN USA Commends U.S. House for Passage of Joshua Omvig
Veterans Suicide Prevention Act**

Washington, D.C. (March 21, 2007) – Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN USA) today praised the U.S. House for overwhelmingly approving the Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act (H.R. 327) to prevent the incidence of suicide among veterans. SPAN USA thanked U.S. House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Bob Filner of California and the bill's sponsor, Rep. Leonard Boswell of Iowa, for their work in ensuring the measure's swift passage.

The Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act 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 would develop an outreach and education program for veterans and their families to recognize readjustment problems and promote mental health.

"Nothing is more important than ensuring that our veterans receive the mental health care that they need. SPAN USA applauds the U.S. House for its swift action," said Jerry Reed, executive director of SPAN USA. "Preliminary data indicates that veterans are at a higher-than-average risk for suicide. The data suggests that 19 percent of all completed suicides are veterans, but they only make up 11 percent of the population – making passage of the Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act all the more critical."

The bill is named for Joshua Omvig, 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.

"One life lost to suicide is one too many. With the passage of the Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention bill today in the House, I'm hopeful that this problem will be adequately addressed by the VA," said Rep. Boswell.

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.