

**Chairman Jerry Moran Opening Statement
Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction,
Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies**

Hearing titled “Preventing Veteran Suicide”

April 27, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

Welcome to our second subcommittee hearing of 2017. The Subcommittee will come to order. Good morning. Thank you all for being here today to consider the important and tragic topic of veteran suicide. The latest data available suggests 20 veterans a day take their own life, and we all agree that even one is too many.

Today we have a large panel – but each member brings valuable expertise on how to help veterans in crisis. Today we will discuss the impact of the Department’s efforts to combat veteran suicide as well as how community-based organizations and cutting-edge research are leading and supporting initiatives to eliminate veteran suicide. I do want to note that while headlines have brought attention to deficiencies in the VA’s management of certain programs, the news does not tell the stories of lives that are saved. This hearing is about bringing awareness not only to the issues that may need work, but also to share the success that is occurring every day by mental health professionals across the VA who are saving the lives of veterans.

This subcommittee has responded with increases in funding for veteran suicide prevention programs, the Veterans Crisis Line, and mental healthcare. There have been increases in funding each year. Yet, since 2001, the rate of veterans using VA healthcare who were diagnosed with a mental health or substance abuse disorder rose “substantially” from 27 percent to more than 40 percent; and we have seen veteran suicide rates remain steady. I want to hear today from the Department on the plan to address this disconnect – if not an increase in funding then what? I do not see a connection between increased funding and better outcomes. I hope our community witnesses will speak to that disconnect, provide their perspective on resources, and share where they see the greatest need or opportunity for better investments to prevent suicide among our veterans.

What should we be doing differently; what are we not doing that should be done? Where appropriate, are there complementary and alternative treatments that should be embraced? How are job training and education incorporated into a treatment plan for veterans? What about family support – marriage and family counseling, caregiver support, providing mechanisms for connecting families caring for veterans in need?

We know, especially in our rural areas, access to mental healthcare can be extraordinarily difficult. We need to make certain no veteran feels abandoned by the country they served when they make the brave decision to seek mental healthcare services. I hope to hear today that the Department has a plan for increasing access to this crucial type of care in the places that need it the most.

Congress needs to know better how to support the Department, the Department needs to seek community partners and embrace the helpful findings of outside experts, and veteran-supporting groups need to be vocal about the needs of in-crisis veterans and their families. I hope this hearing helps bring us together to end veteran suicide.

I'd like to introduce our panel:

Dr. Carolyn Clancy, M.D., is the Deputy Undersecretary for Health for Organizational Excellence at the Veterans Health Administration. She is accompanied by Dr. Harold Kudler, M.D., Chief Consultant for Mental Health Services.

Dr. Stephanie Davis is a Suicide Prevention Coordinator and Staff Psychologist from the VA Eastern Kansas Healthcare System.

Mrs. Melissa Jarboe is the Chief Executive Officer and Founder of the Military Veteran Project located in Topeka, Kansas – but with a worldwide presence. Melissa is a Gold Star Wife, who has dedicated her life to support soldiers and veterans – a promise she made to her late husband, Staff Sergeant Jamie Jarboe.

The Honorable Michael Missal is the Inspector General at the Department of Veterans Affairs; and,

Mr. Rajeev Ramchand is a Senior Behavioral Scientist at the RAND Corporation who is an expert on the prevalence, prevention, and treatment of mental health in service members.

Welcome to all of you.

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