

Sen. Coburn Blasted for Blocking Suicide Prevention Bill

Washington, D.C. (December 15, 2014) – Due to the action of one U.S. Senator, critical legislation that would address the epidemic of veteran suicide was today blocked in the Senate. Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), which spearheaded the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans (SAV) Act, blasted Senator Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) for objecting to passage of this vital legislation that would support the veterans community. The legislation, unanimously passed last Tuesday by the House, is named after Iraq and Afghanistan war veteran Clay Hunt, a Marine who died by suicide in 2011.

“As parents who experienced the pain of losing a veteran to suicide, it is shocking to see this bill blocked because of one lone Senator’s agenda,” said Susan Selke, mother of Clay Hunt. “Too many veterans are facing the same bureaucratic red tape Clay confronted years ago, and they are looking to our elected leaders for hope. While throughout this process we have been so thankful for the widespread and sincere support from our Congressional leaders, today, once again, vets like my son were failed. I am grieving thinking of those young men and women who will be delayed receiving help because of this inaction. The VA’s mental health care system needs urgent change as more veterans die from suicide than on the battlefield, and Senator Coburn’s action today just delays that reform.”

“It’s a shame that after two decades of service in Washington, Sen. Coburn will always be remembered for this final, misguided attack on veterans nationwide. It’s sickening to think another 22 veterans will die by suicide today and every day we fail to expand mental health care for our vets. While we appreciate the many Senators who have stood up to support our bill and our nation’s veterans, we join them in expressing our dismay that Senator Coburn would block this fiscally responsible bill,” said IAVA CEO and Founder Paul Rieckhoff. “While we recognize Senator Coburn’s reputation as a budget hawk, clearly the minor cost of this bill would have a tremendous payoff to help save lives in our community. This isn’t about spending new money – it’s about honoring the commitment we owe to the men and women who put on the uniform. With the suicide crisis continuing, it is unconscionable for a lone Senator to block a fair vote and for Congress to leave Washington without dealing with this crisis. This fight is not over because the suicide crisis is not over. If it takes 90 days for the new Congress to re-pass this bill, the statistics tell us another 1,980 vets will have died by suicide. That should be a heavy burden on the conscience of Senator Coburn and this Congress. Have no doubt, we will be back with reinforcements when the next Congress arrives.”

IAVA and its members do appreciate the leadership of Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) for bringing the bill to the floor for a vote. IAVA also thanks the Senate sponsors of the bill, Senators John McCain (R-Ariz.),

Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Richard Burr (R-N.C.), and Joe Manchin (D-W.V.), as well as all those who signed on to support the measure. [A total of 21 co-sponsors](#) – 11 Republicans and 10 Democrats – supported the Clay Hunt SAV Act.