

Lone Senator Stopping Passage of Veterans Suicide Prevention Bill

Clay Hunt SAV Act being held by Sen. Tom Coburn

Washington D.C. (December 15, 2014) – On the final day of this legislative session, IAVA and veterans groups from around the country join in demanding Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) release his block on the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for America's Veterans (SAV) Act. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and a broad coalition of more than 15 Veteran Service Organizations and a large bi-partisan group of Senators support the bill sponsored by combat veteran John McCain (R-Ariz.). The Clay Hunt SAV Act, named after a Marine who died by suicide in 2011, will improve access to quality mental health care for veterans and combat a national suicide crisis resulting in the deaths of 22 veterans every day.

The eyes of veterans across the country will be watching when the Senate is expected to take up the bill soon after 6 p.m. tonight, live on C-SPAN 2.

On Friday, Sen. Coburn listed his concerns on the Clay Hunt SAV Act. Alex Nicholson, IAVA Legislative Director, addressed those concerns in a rebuttal posted [here](#).

[Now sponsored by 21 Senators](#) – 11 Republicans and 10 Democrats – the bipartisan legislation passed the House by a unanimous voice vote last Tuesday, but has been blocked from Senate consideration due to Sen. Coburn's hold. Co-sponsors include Texas Senator John Cornyn (R), the representative of Clay Hunt's parents, Susan and Richard Selke, who live in Houston.

Supporters of the Clay Hunt SAV Act include: American Psychiatric Association, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, U.S. Army Warrant Officer Association, Disabled American Veterans, Wounded Warrior Project, Military Officers Association of American, National Military Family Association, Marine Corps League, Association of the United States Navy, The Retired Enlisted Association, Fleet Reserve Association, Air Force Sergeants Association, Jewish War Veterans, and Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service. At the same time, outrage at Senator Coburn's potential betrayal of veterans has come from across the country from diverse voices ranging from Montel Williams to Cher and thousands of veterans in Senator's Coburn's home state of Oklahoma.

Last week, Susan and Richard Selke [appealed to Sen. Coburn personally](#). "I understand you are a man of principles, and that you very vehemently and painstakingly watch over our national budget," said Selke. "Susan and I are conservative Republicans from the state of Texas. I appreciate your vigilance over our budget. The bill we are talking about is projected to cost about \$22

million dollars. That's a lot of money to me. It's a lot of money to you. But in the context of the value of a human life, it is insignificant."

"This is why people hate Washington. Senator Coburn is the only person stopping this bill from becoming law," said IAVA CEO and Founder Paul Rieckhoff. "If Senator Coburn blocks the Clay Hunt SAV Act, an enduring part of his legacy will be killing an overwhelmingly supported bipartisan suicide prevention bill for our veterans. That has real implications. If it takes 90 days to revisit this issue in the next Congress, the statistics tell us that 1,980 additional veterans will die by suicide. Senator Coburn needs to think carefully about that number in addition to his concerns about the minimal financial costs of this bill."

IAVA supporters will make their voices heard by visiting Sen. Coburn's offices in person to ask him to lift his hold on the bill. Click here for information about visiting his [Capitol Hill](#), [Tulsa](#) and [Oklahoma City](#) offices.

According to a [recent survey conducted by IAVA veterans](#), 47 percent of respondents said they know at least one Iraq or Afghanistan veteran who has attempted suicide, while 40 percent of respondents know someone who has died by suicide, up three points from 2013.