

On Eve of HVAC Testimony, Texas Family Urges Lawmakers to Combat Veteran Suicide

Washington DC (July 9, 2014) – Today, Susan and Richard Selke – parents of Marine veteran Clay Hunt who died by suicide in 2011 – met with Senate Veterans Affairs Committee (SVAC) Chairman Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Senator John Walsh (D-MT) on Capitol Hill about combating veteran suicide and addressing access to mental health care. The Selkes met with the Senators ahead of their testimony tomorrow morning at a hearing on access to mental health care. IAVA CEO and Founder Paul Rieckhoff and Legislative Director Alex Nicholson were also present at the meetings.

During IAVA's 10th annual Storm the Hill in late March, Sen. John Walsh introduced the Suicide Prevention For America's Veterans Act (SAV Act), S.B. 2182. Tomorrow, House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) Chairman Jeff Miller (R-FL) will introduce the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention For American Veterans Act (Clay Hunt SAV), named after the Selke's son, [at a 2:30 p.m. press conference at the House Triangle](#).

"Had this bill been passed a few years ago, I do believe we would still have Clay today," said Susan Selke, mother of Clay Hunt. "Our country is losing 22 veterans to suicide a day – about 600 veterans a month. It is so difficult for one to grasp that number. These losses don't take into account the impact of family members and loved ones and how their lives are changed. We thank Chairman Sanders and Sen. Walsh for hearing our story and for pressing their colleagues to address veteran suicide."

Combating veteran suicide and improving access to mental health care has been IAVA's top priority for 2014. According to IAVA's 2014 Member Survey, 40% of respondents said they know at least one Iraq or Afghanistan veteran that has died by suicide.

"Susan and Richard have shown so much strength as they continue to advocate on behalf of veterans," said IAVA CEO and Founder Paul Rieckhoff. "We thank Chairman Sanders and Sen. Walsh for meeting with us today and continuing to support our community. The Selkes are here because they personally know this is an urgent fight. The first step in reversing the suicide trend among veterans is to pass the Clay Hunt SAV Act. We want members of Congress to know this is an important, nonpartisan issue that will change the life path for thousands of veterans and their families."

The Campaign to Combat Suicide was designed to raise public awareness of the suicide crisis, demand Congressional action and a Presidential Executive Order to start to reverse the suicide trend.

As part of its [Campaign to Combat Suicide](#), all year long IAVA will activate

every element of its membership, programs and partners – both on-the-ground and online. IAVA will incorporate this effort into everything we do from our monthly VetTogethers to our over 500,000-person strong social media community. We will empower our almost 300,000 members and supporters to serve as a ground force for outreach, support and advocacy. And we will travel the country, turning public attention to the issue of veteran suicide and promoting solutions.

IAVA connects veterans to mental health services, including partnering with the VA's Veterans Crisis Line to ensure that every servicemember, veteran, family member and provider knows that there is free and confidential help available 24 hours a day through phone, text and online. Veterans, or those concerned about veterans, can call 800-273-8255 and press 1 to be directly connected to qualified responders.