

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

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565 Words

Kansas recently experienced a tragic loss when one of our soldiers committed suicide. My sincere thoughts and prayers are with the family of this young soldier, and I know my fellow Kansans join me in extending heartfelt sympathies.

Sadly, the Army has seen a 20 percent increase in suicide rates from 102 suicides in 2006 to 121 suicides in 2007. While we may never know the exact reason a person takes his or her life, the Army reports that the strain of war on personal relationships, legal and financial problems, and the mental health issues associated with combat contribute to soldiers' suicides.

Americans have shown their support for the troops by proudly rallying and welcoming soldiers returning home from tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. But what happens to our soldiers when the parade stops and the welcoming party ends?

Many soldiers returning home from war face the challenging mission of recovering from their combat wounds, which can be both physical and mental. It is the mental wounds that are so difficult to understand and treat.

At least one in three Iraq war veterans, and one in nine Afghanistan war veterans, will suffer from mental health issues. Sadly, most veterans confronting mental health issues will suffer alone, in silence.

We must redefine soldiers' mental health problems as what they are: war wounds. The sooner we understand the root of mental health issues, the sooner we will be able to help our brave veterans who have selflessly put themselves in harm's way to defend our freedoms. We certainly must do no less than work tirelessly to heal their wounds.

Much work remains to improve the health care our government offers veterans who are suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other mental health wounds. I will continue to strongly support Congressional efforts for an increased awareness and investment in PTSD programs throughout the Department of Defense and Veterans Medical Centers across the nation.

Military commanders and military members can work to decrease the stigma of mental health wounds and ensure that their soldiers get vital treatment. Family members and fellow soldiers can be trained to recognize the symptoms of PTSD and provide the love and support our soldiers need when returning from the horrors of war.

It is equally important that civilians come together to help our veterans. Too often we hear of soldiers who escape enemies on the battlefield only to succumb to the demons in

their minds. Every military death due to suicide is preventable, and we as a community can help.

The first step is to encourage soldiers to seek medical assistance when necessary. As families and communities, we need to be able to identify the warning signs of PTSD.

Materials on the National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder's website serve as a great resource for PTSD-related issues. The site also provides information if a soldier needs help.

Faith-based organizations, local non-profits, and individual volunteers can help the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs' support systems for wounded veterans. These groups can provide much-needed hope and comfort for struggling soldiers in times of distress.

All Americans owe a debt of gratitude to the honorable men and women in uniform who bravely work to secure the freedoms we so often take for granted. Surely this is a debt that can never be repaid, but that doesn't mean we should ever stop trying.