

U.S. Representative Rush Holt Wednesday hosted a forum for hundreds of Central New Jersey veterans. With the participation of officials from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, Holt addressed veterans concerns about health care, the GI Bill, veterans employment, and other issues.

A recording of last night's teleforum can be accessed at <http://holt.house.gov/images/stories/holttru16.wav>

"Our country was founded by citizen-soldiers and it is because of work that you have done that has kept us free. I'm certainly working every day to ensure that you get the health care, the education benefits, and the other things that are due to you. And they are due to you because of a national promise," Holt said.

Among the issues Holt discussed was his work to improve military suicide prevention efforts. Earlier this year, the House passed Holt's initiative to fill a void in the military's suicide prevention efforts among members of the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR). Holt introduced legislation named in memory of Sergeant Coleman Bean, an East Brunswick man who took his own life after serving two tours in Iraq. Unlike their active duty counterparts or those normally assigned to existing Guard and Reserve units, members of the IRR and those designated as IMAs normally are only assigned to units upon mobilization. In between deployments, they lack direct, easy access to the kinds of suicide prevention services and support structures available to active duty troops – a deficiency my bill seeks to fix. Under the House-passed bill, someone from the Department of Defense would be required to check on reserves regularly and to ensure their needs are being met. Senator Lautenberg has introduced companion legislation on the Senate side.

In addition, Holt succeeded in including an amendment in the House-passed funding bill for the Department of Veterans Affairs directing the Secretary of the VA to spend \$20 million for suicide prevention outreach, both through direct advertising and on online social media like Facebook and Twitter.

The same funding bill, which the Senate must approve, provides \$50.6 billion in advance funding for the following fiscal year. For years, Holt had heard from veterans and their doctors that the VA was running out of money months before the end of the fiscal year. The bill would

help ensure no shortfalls.