

(Washington, D.C.) – On Tuesday evening, Republican leadership in the U.S. House of Representatives blocked consideration of an amendment by U.S. Rep. Rush Holt (NJ-12) to the annual National Defense Authorization Act that would provide suicide prevention services to American veterans.

Holt spoke Wednesday afternoon on the House floor to urge that his amendment be allowed to reach an up-or-down vote. The prepared text of Holt's remarks is below.

Holt's proposal was an updated version of an amendment passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in 2010. Full details of that amendment are available at [http://www.holt.house.gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=461&Itemid=18](http://www.holt.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=461&Itemid=18)

“Mr. Chairman, on an average day, 18 veterans commit suicide. Over the last two years, we've lost more troops to suicide than to combat itself. These painful facts were ignored by the majority last night when they blocked an amendment I offered to the National Defense Authorization Act. The message sent to combat veterans was unmistakable: if the intrusive memories of the horrors you witnessed in war are too much and you're thinking about ending your own life, you're on your own.

“Yesterday evening, Republican leadership blocked an amendment that I offered that has passed his House twice and would have provided direct suicide prevention services to 123,000 Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom veterans – members of the Individual Ready Reserve, Individual Mobilization Augmentees, and the inactive National Guard.

“This provision was not a luxury; it was a necessity – and it was strongly supported by Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Veterans for Common Sense, and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Nothing in the base bill and no amendment made in order would provide these Guard and Reserve members the outreach and services they need.

“The veterans in question experienced the horrors of war first hand, yet they have no daily direct

access to the counseling and support services that their active duty counterparts enjoy, even though they remain deployable. Blocking this amendment is an insult to these service members and to families who have already lost a loved one to suicide.

“The Bean family of Milltown, New Jersey are just one such family. Their son, Coleman, an Individual Ready Reservist and two-tour Iraq veteran, became a victim of war-related suicide in September 2008. No other family should have to endure what the Beans have endured, and my amendment would have helped prevent future such tragedies.

“The deliberate exclusion of a badly needed suicide prevention initiative is one of the most compelling reasons to vote down this rule and the underlying bill, and I urge my colleagues to join me in doing so.”

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