

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

March 4, 2013

Chuck Hagel

Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Eric Shinseki

Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Department of Veterans Affairs
801 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Hagel and Secretary Shinseki,

Suicides among service members and veterans continue at unacceptably high levels, despite efforts by the Department of Defense (DOD), Veterans Affairs (VA), Veterans Service Organizations (VSO), and the private sector. Suicides in 2012 among active duty personnel reached 349, a record level. In addition, according to the VA's 2012 Suicide Data Report released February 1, 2013, certain segments of the veteran population may be chronically under-reported, meaning that the current estimate of 18 to 22 veteran deaths by suicide per day may in fact be underestimated. By collecting information about the physical injuries sustained by suicide victims, we can get a better sense of the root causes of military and veteran suicide.

As you know, the Improvised Explosive Device (IED) has become the weapon of choice for groups seeking to achieve their goals through terror and violence. According to DOD data as well as data compiled by the Global Campaign against IEDs, during the period November 2011 through October 2012, there were over 15,000 IED events against coalition forces in Afghanistan and 58 percent of coalition casualties were from IEDs. While the number Killed in Action has decreased, the number of wounded who must live with the physical and psychological scars is growing. As we prepare to bring 34,000 troops home from Afghanistan this year and the entirety of the 66,000 member strong force by the end of 2014, we must gain a better understanding of the psychological impact of injuries from IEDs.

Evidence has suggested that blast injuries, including but not limited to those causing damage to vision or hearing, can have a severe psychological impact, contributing to PTSD and other emotional distress that can play a major contributing role in suicides. In order to get a better understanding of the connection between blast injuries and suicide, and in support of the ongoing National Mortality Study, conducted by the VA with the cooperation of the DOD and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, we respectfully request the following information:

1. What blast trauma tissue and physiological studies and other IED blast and injury related research is being conducted within the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs by any organization (JIEDDO, DARPA, medical facilities, etc.)?
2. Which of these studies are (or were) jointly conducted by the departments and with whom?

3. What process is used to share the results of this research within the departments, with Congress, and among VSOs and other partners such as the Global Campaign Against IEDs?
4. What demographics and other data (including date of suicide or attempt, branch of service, state of residency, combat tours completed, status as a DOD contractor in OIF or OEF, etc.) is being compiled as part of the on-going National Mortality study by the VA?

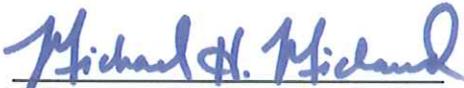
In addition, we ask that the following areas of inquiry be added to the study plan for the National Mortality Study and provided to Congress upon its completion.

1. How many service members or veterans who committed or attempted suicide were the direct victims of an IED attack? If so, what injuries did he or she sustain?
2. If the service member or veteran was the indirect victim of an IED attack, provide the number of IED attacks on his or her unit during the period the service member or veteran was assigned and the casualties for that unit during that period, if known.
3. Was the service member or veteran diagnosed with PTSD or TBI before the suicide or attempted suicide?
4. Did the service member or veteran seek or receive suicide prevention counseling or treatment before the suicide or attempted suicide?
5. Specify autopsy findings (and their corresponding frequencies) potentially indicative of prior TBI. For example (but not limited to), chronic traumatic encephalopathy and increases in associated lipid compounds.
6. More than three years ago, in the National Defense Authorization Acts (NDAA) for 2008 and 2009, Congress mandated that DOD establish a joint injury registry between DOD and VA for TBI, Vision, Hearing, and limb extremity/amputee injuries all common from IEDs. What is the status of these joint traumatic injury registries?

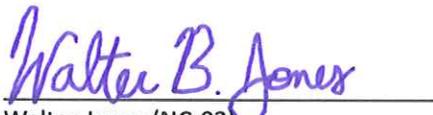
Thank you for your consideration.

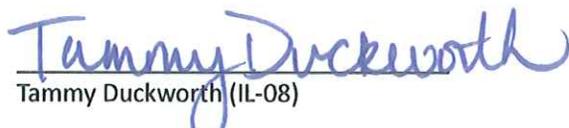

Dan Benishek MD (MI-01)


Julia Brownley (CA-26)

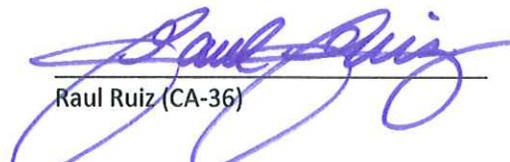

Mike Michaud (ME-02)

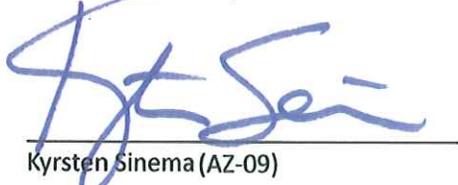

Mike Coffman (CO-06)

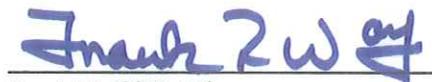

Walter Jones (NC-03)


Tammy Duckworth (IL-08)


Ron Barber (AZ-02)


Raul Ruiz (CA-36)


Kyrsten Sinema (AZ-09)

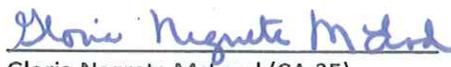

Frank Wolf (VA-10)

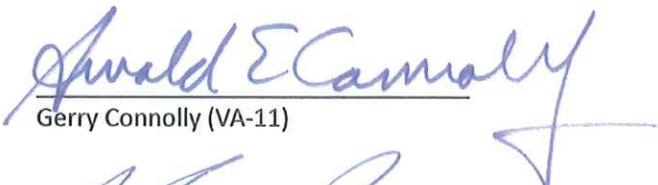

Mike Fitzpatrick (PA-08)


Richard Hanna (NY-22)


John Conyers (MI-13)


Barbara Lee (CA-13)


Gloria Negrete McLeod (CA-35)


Gerry Connolly (VA-11)


Tim Ryan (OH-13)


Kerry Bentivolio (MI-11)


Chris Stewart (UT-02)


C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger (MD-02)


Charlie Rangel (NY-13)


Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC)

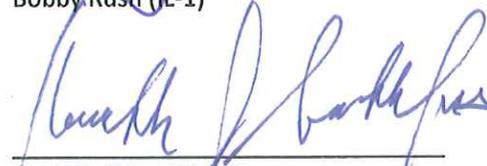

Robert Latta (OH-5)


Raul Grijalva (AZ-03)


Rick Larsen (WA-02)

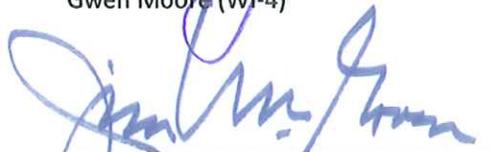

Bobby Rush (IL-1)


Ed Whitfield (KY-1)


Keith Rothfus (PA-12)


Gwen Moore (WI-4)


Jim Himes (CT-4)

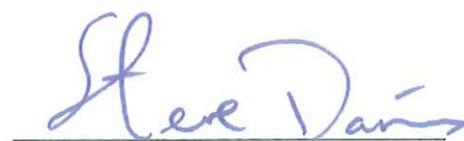

James McGovern (MA-2)


Alan Lowenthal (CA-47)


Tim Walz (MN-1)


Dina Titus (NV-1)


Beto O'Rourke (TX-16)


Steve Daines (MT)



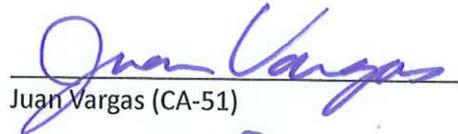
Ken Calvert (CA-42)



Ann McLane Kuster (NH-2)



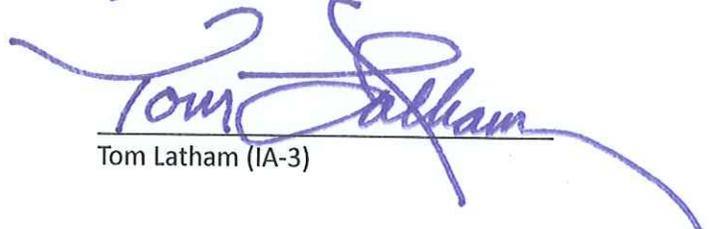
Mark Takano (CA-41)



Juan Vargas (CA-51)



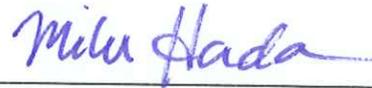
Andy Harris (MD-1)



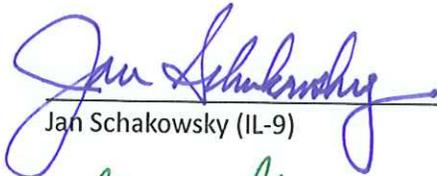
Tom Latham (IA-3)



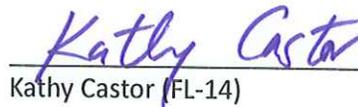
Louise Slaughter (NY-25)



Mike Honda (CA-17)



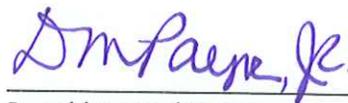
Jan Schakowsky (IL-9)



Kathy Castor (FL-14)



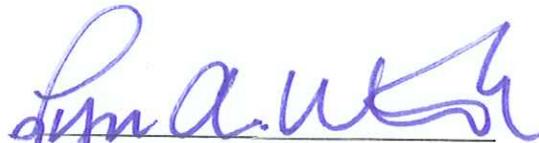
Gene Green (TX-29)



Donald Payne (NJ-10)



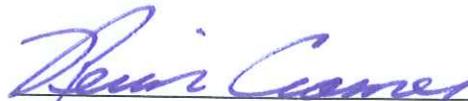
Marcia Fudge (OH-11)



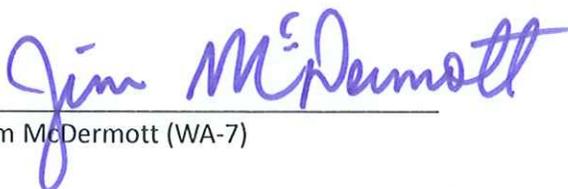
Lynn Westmoreland (GA-3)



Earl Blumenauer (OR-3)



Kevin Cramer (ND)



Jim McDermott (WA-7)