February 20, 2018

Chairman Uecker, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Thomas, I'm pleased to provide sponsor testimony for legislation that will make the first Saturday in May Veterans Suicide Awareness Day. This idea came from a constituent of mine, Jadon Rutledge. Jadon is a veteran of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Often it seems that after serving our country valiantly overseas, our veterans are fighting another war back here at home. Many veterans do not know where to turn when it comes to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and suicide prevention. They feel lost and alone.

Programs such as 24/7 Veterans Crisis Line and www.veteranscrisisline.net have been established to help veterans that are in need and to let them know they are definitely not alone. Awareness of the availability of these programs needs to be raised so that we can help veterans and their families know who to reach out to when they or a loved one is in crisis. Programs can save lives if veterans and others know they exist.

In 2014, Veterans accounted for 18% of all deaths from suicide among U.S. adults, while Veterans made up 8.5% of the US population. In 2010, Veterans accounted for 22% of all deaths from suicide and 9.7% of the population.

By establishing a “Veterans Suicide Awareness Day”, to supplement Veterans Suicide Awareness month in September, civilians and veterans alike can draw attention to this tragic issue and increase awareness of resources that are available to help those veterans in need. Help stand up for those who have stood up for our country. Let veterans know they are not alone.

Representative Lanese would like to offer sponsor testimony as well, and the we'd be glad to answer any questions you have.

Chairman Uecker, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Thomas, we ask for your favorable consideration of House Bill 202.