



Chairman Uecker, Vice Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Thomas, and to the rest of the committee, I'm pleased to provide proponent testimony for House Bill 202.

Today, I want to talk about purpose and choice. At some point in any man or woman's life they will find themselves in that "rock and a hard place" that forces them to make a choice that will impact their lives significantly for better or worse, or even both. In those moments when forced to make a choice that will carry with it any number of consequences that are good or bad... I believe it's those choices that define who we are and establish our purpose. Through my own life I have made those hard calls and would do it all over again... why... because that's my purpose... that's my choice. Having the intestinal fortitude to do the right thing to protect the ones that deserve it and even the ones that don't, my choice, I knew I wrote that blank check and signed on the line next to the x, my choice, it's also my choice to give this written testimony, and I'm honored to do so, a choice that was very easy to make. Veteran Suicide and the mission to end it, that's my purpose. Before I received a phone call late one night from Tom Indorf who started the ball rolling to form what we are now in SAVE22, I would go through the daily grind and get by with no purpose towards the greater good. When I speak to others about this topic, some say that I almost seem angry through the conversation or some would say that they can see the passion in me. Regardless of the statement made to me or any of us the reply is always the same, "this is our new mission, this IS our purpose."

Let's switch gears for a moment, let's talk about the possibility that there are some things we don't have a choice over or at least a diminished capacity towards those choices. Maybe it's because of the meds that the VA or other doctors give you, maybe it's the home life and living situation, or maybe it's the miss-firing of the synapses in our brain. The truth is there are so many variables that one systematic design will never be the answer. Six years it took for me to seek help, for 6 years I refused to believe that things like depression or PTSD even existed, for six years I used the "I'm a Marine, I don't need all that!" I complained if someone would use excuses like PTSD or any of the myriad of mental health labels. Ladies and gentlemen I promise you all I was wrong, so wrong that I was all over the place with the highs and lows. It probably appeared that I had multiple personalities with all the mood swings, but again I would tell myself that I don't need them, I survived some of the worst hell this world has to offer" and justified it even further by saying to myself, "there are guys out there with way worse problems, guys missing parts of their body after being blown apart by an IED or even worse yet, the impact of losing guys that died fighting for our right to have that choice. Surely there are thousands more out there that suffer much harsher problems than me so suck it up buttercup and keep charging forward." Of course those are all thoughts running through your head but they are very valid! That's the mentality that we have to breakdown in order to get through to our Veterans before we can fight this new mission on the home front.

So let's bring this full circle... today I have shared various types of choice and purpose so let's redirect to all of you. Each of you made a choice that would put every single word or action that comes from you on public trial essentially, the people of this great state made the choice to elect you. Have you done your part?

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I want to leave you with my final thought... what are each of you going to do to help combat this epidemic? What's your purpose if not to do all that is necessary and demanded from the rank and file, to help protect our people from what could be one of the worst epidemics these generations have faced in our lifetime?

Again, I ask each of you today if YOU will do what it takes to get our state and eventually our country on a path that cares of no race or religion, a unified system created by our country's brothers and sister with total disregard to politics, a system that will truly help our veterans.

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

Thank you.

- Jason Rutledge