****

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **For Immediate Release:** | **Contact:** Megan Taylor |
| June 25, 2018 | 202-224-6244 |

**Senate Unanimously Passes Heller-Heitkamp Resolution Designating June 2018 National Post-Traumatic Stress Awareness Month**

*Heller Author of New Law to Expand Veterans’ Access to Mental Health Care Services*

**WASHINGTON, D.C. –** U.S. Senators Dean Heller (R-NV) and Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND) have announced the U.S. Senate unanimously passed their bipartisan resolution to designate June 2018 as National Post-Traumatic Stress Awareness Month and June 27, 2018, as National Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS) Awareness Day. The resolution comes nearly three months after Heller introduced the [Veteran Urgent Access to Mental Health Care Act](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=42D0F165-0646-4EE0-9383-13500FF34336), legislation that the President signed into law to expand veterans’ access to mental health care services.

For the sixth consecutive year, Heller and Heitkamp have introduced this bipartisan resolution to raise awareness about U.S. military veterans impacted by PTS and to reduce the stigma associated with the condition, including by prompting an examination of the national discussion surrounding PTS, as well as reaffirming that PTS is a common injury that is treatable and repairable. Since 2001, more than half of all Afghanistan and Iraq veterans treated by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have been diagnosed with at least one mental health condition – and up to one-fifth with PTS.

“When I meet with veterans throughout the state of Nevada, I consistently hear about the challenges of addressing post-traumatic stress when our service members return from combat,” **said Heller.** “As a senior member of the U.S. Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, I believe that it is our responsibility to ensure that we take care of our veterans’ invisible injuries, and that’s why I’m pleased that the president recently signed into law my bill to expand access to mental health care treatment. I’m proud to have worked with Senator Heitkamp on this bipartisan resolution that aims to destigmatize post-traumatic stress and raise awareness of the importance of providing our veterans with the support, services, and treatment that they need once they return home.”

A senior member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, Heller [introduced](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=4AE4659E-A7E9-472B-8FCF-31E7EC53DEBFhttps://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=4AE4659E-A7E9-472B-8FCF-31E7EC53DEBF) the Veteran Urgent Access to Mental Health Care Act to provide mental health treatment to veterans who may not have access to benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). It was included in the government-funding bill that Congress approved and the President signed into law in March of 2018.

“The hidden wounds of battle affect many of our state’s servicemembers across all eras, and it’s our sacred responsibility to give these veterans the support they’ve earned through their sacrifice,” **said Heitkamp.** “Congress must continue to take action to halt the rapid rate of veteran deaths as a result of suicide and find new ways to reduce the perpetuation of the stigma surrounding post-traumatic stress. Every year since I’ve arrived in the U.S. Senate, Senator Heller and I have introduced this bipartisan resolution with the aims of reducing depression and suicide among veterans and making sure they can reach out for help and be heard. And while increasing awareness about this critical issue is extremely important, we must also redouble our commitment to giving those who served the mental health resources they need, especially those who were injured during their service to our country—whether visible or invisible.”

Members of the military exposed to combat are particularly at risk to develop PTS, which contributes to a growing crisis of suicide among returning veterans. In 2014, the most recent year data is available, the suicide rate of U.S. veterans was almost three times higher than the rate in the general population. According to the VA, approximately 8 million adults experience PTS during a given year.

###