

June 4, 2009

U.S. REPS. TODD AKIN AND GABRIELLE GIFFORDS INTRODUCE LEGISLATION TO EXPAND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR WARRIORS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Arizona Democrat and Missouri Republican team up to address post-traumatic stress disorder

Washington, DC – U.S. Reps. Todd Akin (R-MO) and Gabrielle Giffords (D-AZ) introduced two bills on Thursday aimed at expanding mental health services for America's service members and their families.

Akin(R-MO), who is ranking member of the House Armed Service's Seapower Subcommittee said mental health support is crucial for the men and women who serve in our armed forces.

"These two bills will make sure our National Guard and Reserve forces, and our veterans, get the support they need when the fighting is over and they have returned home," he said. "The stress of combat can have long-lasting effects and as a nation we must support the men and women who have sacrificed much to keep our nation safe."

"Our men and women in uniform are ready, willing and able to stand up and defend our country when our country needs them most," said Giffords. "We need to stand up for them and their families. Many of the mental health problems that tragically lead to suicide can and should be treated."

The bills that will be introduced by Giffords and Akin are H.R. 2699, the *Armed Forces Behavioral Health Awareness Act*, and H.R. 2698, the *Veterans and Survivors Behavioral Health Awareness Act*

H.R. 2699:

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Allows members of the National Guard and Reserves who served during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom but who are no longer on active duty to access counseling and related mental health services through Vet Centers

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Makes available grants to nonprofit organizations that provide emotional support services for survivors of deceased members of the Armed Forces

- Creates a pilot program in the Army for enhancing awareness of post-traumatic stress disorders

H.R. 2698:

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Creates a service scholarship program to help Vet Centers recruit and retain behavioral health specialists by requiring scholarship recipients to serve in Vet Centers

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Expands access for veterans and survivors by requiring the VA to provide referrals to vets seeking mental health care outside the VA system

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Provides grants to nonprofit organizations that provide peer-to-peer support services to survivors

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Requires the VA to advise vets of their rights to apply for a review of their discharge or release from service based upon a request for counseling.