



Times-Standard

Thompson introduces bill to help vets with PTSD

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With more and more veterans coming back from Iraq with post-traumatic stress disorder, North Coast Congressman Mike Thompson is trying to make sure they get the help they need.

Thompson and Rep. Denny Rehberg, R-Mont., introduced legislation Thursday in the House that would require every soldier to have face-to-face mental health screening before being deployed on a combat mission, again upon their return and then every six months for the next two years. The bill is companion legislation to a measure introduced in the Senate by Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont.

"At least one in five new veterans are experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder or major depression, but there isn't a system in place that can adequately address this crisis," Thompson said in a press release. "This legislation will fill this void."

Post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, is an anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to terrifying or life-threatening events. Symptoms of the disorder come in many forms, but often include feeling emotionally numb, experiencing persistent frightening thoughts or vivid memories, having trouble sleeping, being easily startled and feeling constantly on edge.

According to the National Institute on Mental Health, about 7.7 million American adults are living with PTSD and 19 percent of Vietnam-era combat veterans experienced PTSD at some point after the

war.

A 2003 study by the New England Journal of Medicine, conducted before the peak of violence in Iraq, found that 15 to 17 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans were suffering from PTSD. The study also found that more than 60 percent of those showing symptoms were unlikely to seek help because of fears of stigmatization.

The Post-Deployment Health Assessment Act of 2009 would create new requirements for identification of PTSD among soldiers. Prior to deployment, a soldier would be interviewed in order to establish a baseline against which a subsequent interview upon return from a combat mission could be measured. By requiring these interviews to be timely and personal, Thompson and Rehberg believe the likelihood of identifying PTSD in order to begin treatment is dramatically increased.

"This legislation's intensive face-to-face screening program will provide the military with a powerful tool to help our injured heroes get help for their post-traumatic stress injuries," said Matt Kuntz, Montana's executive director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, in a press release.

This bill isn't the first time Thompson and Rehberg have joined forces. Last year, the two introduced legislation that would have provided health care to veterans who were subjected, many unknowingly, to biological and chemical weapons tests.

Thompson said the bill is a solution that fits the problem.

"It is a practical solution and has already been successfully tested in the field," Thompson said. "We owe it to our brave men and women serving our country to make sure that they get the services they have earned, and I will do all I can do to get this bill

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