



## **Baucus' PTSD measure included in defense bill**

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WASHINGTON - Montana Sen. Max Baucus today announced his legislation to provide mental health assessments to returning combat troops to help identify and treat post-combat stress injuries and suicidal tendencies is included in this year's defense authorization bill.

The legislation, modeled after a program currently used by the Montana National Guard, would require the military to provide a mental health assessment for every soldier, Marine, airman, or sailor after he or she returns from combat and no later than six, 12 and 24 months after they come home.

The assessments would be provided in a private, clinical setting by licensed mental-health professionals or personnel trained and certified to perform such assessments.

The purpose of the assessments will be to identify Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, suicidal tendencies and other behavioral health issues to identify which service members are in need of additional health care and treatment.

According to a 2008 RAND study, nearly 20 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or depression. The Army's suicide rate has increased every year since the Iraq war began and, in 2008, the Army reported 143 suicides, the highest number since the Army began keeping records in 1980.

Under current policies, post-combat assessments provided for service members vary widely from state to state and from unit to unit.

If troops are not identified with PTSD or other problems upon return from combat, they often do not receive a follow up assessments unless their primary care provider notices a problem during his or her physical exam.

Baucus partnered on the legislation with Matt Kuntz, whose has been a leading advocate for the screenings after his stepbrother, a service member, took his own life.

The bill is endorsed by the Military Officers Association of America, the Enlisted Association of the National Guard, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, the National Guard Association and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

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