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## Rodriguez Hears Testimony on Veteran and Military Suicide Rates 2/24/10

News from U.S. Representative **Ciro D. Rodriguez**  
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Washington, DC – U.S. Congressman **Ciro D. Rodriguez** (TX-23) attended an important Veterans Affairs Committee hearing Wednesday exploring the possible relationship between psychiatric medication and suicides among service members and veterans.

“As a Member of Congress with a large veteran and military constituency, I was shocked to hear the data that so many of our veterans and service members take their own lives due to depression, mental health and other problems,” said Congressman Rodriguez. “This is a preventable problem and we owe it to our brave men and women who have served to find a solution.”

Congressman Rodriguez asked several pointed questions at the hearing. Along with other members of the Veterans Affairs Committee, Congressman Rodriguez heard statements from mental health professionals and testimonials from the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense.

Researchers do not agree on the impact of medication on suicide – some argue that use of medication may push people to the brink while others say the evidence isn’t clear. Results also vary according to the age group being studied.

“The testimony we heard today demonstrates the complexity of this issue and underscores the grave impact that mental health problems and suicide have on not only our service members, but their families and loved ones,” said Congressman Rodriguez. “What works for one patient may not work for another. The bottom line is we need to continue researching how to identify risk factors early and treating patients appropriately and individually so we can avoid the tragedy of suicide among members of our military.”

According to the National Institutes of Mental Health, suicides accounted for 33,000 deaths in 2007. Men are four times more likely than women to die from suicide.

The Journal of the American Medical Association reported that the number of

suicides among active duty soldiers in the Army, Army Reserve and the Army National Guard nearly doubled from 67 in 2004 to 128 in 2008. The suicide rate among veterans also has increased. According to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, 20 percent of the suicides in the United States annually are committed by veterans.

The risk of suicide is compounded by mental health problems. And because there is some evidence that the use of psychiatric medication may have a potential impact on suicide rates, the research into a possible connection is imperative. Factors leading to suicide include depression, family history of mental disorder or substance abuse, family violence, incarceration and firearms in the home (firearms are used in more than half of all suicides).