

### **\*\*\*OPENING STATEMENT\*\*\***

- I want to thank the Chairman for scheduling today's markup as early in the year as possible.
- I've known the Chairman very well for years. And together we've already accomplished a great deal of behalf of our troops, veterans, farmers and rural America.
- In fact, I've done a lot of heavy lifting on Jerry's behalf – helping him get an agriculture appropriations bill across the finish line, and a biomedical research lab in Kansas.
- Moving forward together on this Committee, I'm confident we can accomplish a great deal for veterans. And it's fitting that the first bill on today's agenda is the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act – a bill introduced by myself and the Chairman more than a year ago and named for a former Navy Seal who served our nation honorably for 23 years.
- After serving in combat, Scott returned to Helena, Montana. But his invisible wounds of war followed him home.
- He was open about his journey to recovery, getting involved in the Montana chapter of the National Alliance for Mental Illness and animal therapy programs at Montana Wild.
- He died by suicide on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018.
- This bill honors his legacy by supporting the types of programs that improved Commander Hannon's quality of life. And by expanding our understanding of mental health conditions and their treatments, which may have made diagnosing his conditions easier.

- There are a lot of good provisions in this bill, which is why many of you are cosponsors.
- I am very proud of this bill and of the bipartisan amendment that I, along with Chairman Moran and Senator Boozman, will support to amend section 201.
- This amendment represents a compromise, and I believe it represents everyone's priorities.
- It would allow the Secretary to award grants to community organizations to provide suicide prevention services to veterans and their families.
- And as part of this grant, veterans will be able to receive necessary emergency care when they are in crisis.
- And, if they need ongoing care, they can get that care at the VA, or through VA's community care network, whether they are currently eligible for VA health care or not.
- This comprehensive approach – combining supportive services with evidence-based clinical care provided by the Department – will ensure that no veteran slips through the cracks.
- I want to sincerely thank you, Chairman Moran and Senator Boozman for your leadership and your hard work on getting this bill where it is today.
- When we get there, I encourage all members of this Committee to support including this bipartisan amendment to the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act so we can move this bill forward.

- It would send a very important message – not only to veterans but to the American public – that we can come together during politically turbulent times to do what’s right. In this case, to provide critical support to those who have sacrificed so much on our behalf, and to connect more of them to the life-saving mental health care they need.
- Thank you again, Mr. Chairman. Let’s get to work.