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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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Suicide Prevention Action Network Applauds Bipartisan Vote to Prevent Youth Suicide

*SPAN USA Urges Congress to Fully Appropriate Funding for
Youth Suicide Awareness and Prevention Programs*

Washington, D.C. (September 9, 2004) – The Suicide Prevention Action Network USA (SPAN USA) today applauded Congress for its bipartisan support for a compromise bill that will help prevent suicide among our nation's youth.

The Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act (S. 2634), which passed both the House and Senate today, amends the Public Health Act and authorizes \$82 million in grant money over a three-year period to states, Indian tribes and colleges and universities for the development of youth suicide prevention and intervention programs. The bill calls for early screening programs to identify mental illness in children and provide treatment referrals, training for community child-care professionals and the authorization of a Youth Interagency Research, Training and Technical Assistance Center, which would provide training and technical assistance to states and other eligible entities.

Jerry Reed, executive director of the Suicide Prevention Action Network, applauded Senator Smith's leadership in passing this vital piece of legislation. "Senator Smith's courage in making his personal loss public was a great service to the over 4,000 families who lose a young loved one to suicide each year. This Act will allow young people to get the help they need. SPAN USA applauds the passage of this bill and will continue to work with the Congress to pass mental health parity and ensure that all Americans have access to mental health services."

SPAN USA fully supported the original version of the bill (S. 2634), which passed the Senate by unanimous consent on July 8. However, to reach a compromise with the House, the amended bill requires elementary and secondary school students to receive parental consent before participating in school-sponsored programs, unless it is an emergency situation in which the life of a student is at stake. The issue of parental consent became somewhat contentious during House discussions because participation in many other types of school-sponsored health education programs does not require parental permission.

"SPAN USA concluded that the parental consent issue was a small matter when compared to the greater good that will come from the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act," added Reed.

"Suicide is a preventable public health problem and ultimately, this bill will prevent kids from dying prematurely. We hope Congress will appropriate the \$82 million authorized today by the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act so that thousands of young people will have broad access to mental health services."

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The Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act will bring parity to federal funding for public health issues by more than doubling the amount of money that the federal government allocates to suicide prevention. Although suicide has ranked among the nation's leading causes of death since 1975 and was the third leading cause of death in 2001 among young people 10 to 24 years old, today suicide prevention receives only \$40 million.

SPAN USA is the nation's only suicide prevention organization dedicated to leveraging grassroots support among suicide survivors (those who have lost a loved one to suicide) and others to advance public policies that help prevent suicide. Since its founding eight years ago, SPAN USA has led the drive to make suicide a public health priority by building political will and calling for the development and implementation of a national strategy for suicide prevention. Using its extensive grassroots network of survivors and advocates, SPAN USA has actively promoted the cause on Capitol Hill and in state legislatures.

For more information on suicide prevention, visit SPAN USA's website at www.spanusa.org. To schedule an interview with Jerry Reed or to speak with a survivor, please contact Laura Brinker at 202-715-1540 or laura.brinker@dittus.com.

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