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U.S. Senator Tom Harkin Honored by Suicide Prevention Action Network USA for Efforts to Prevent Suicide Among Veterans

WASHINGTON, D.C., July 19, 2007 — U.S. Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, and U.S. Rep. Jim Ramstad, R-Minnesota, today were honored for their work on suicide prevention as "Allies for Action" by the Suicide Prevention Action Network USA (SPAN USA), the nation's leading grassroots advocacy organization working to advance public policies that prevent suicide.

"Sen. Harkin and Rep. Ramstad have led the way in raising awareness about suicide," Jerry Reed, SPAN USA's executive director, said. "We appreciate their dedication to passing critical legislation to reduce suicide among veterans and to ensure mental health parity."

Sen. Harkin introduced The Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act (S. 479) earlier this year, which directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to develop and implement a comprehensive program to reduce the incidence of suicide among veterans.

"The stress our service men and women endure in combat is enormous and can trigger severe mental health issues after they have returned home. We have a responsibility to treat both the physical injuries and the mental wounds our soldiers suffer," Sen. Harkin said. "The same way swift triage care can save a soldier on the battlefield, accurate diagnosis and delivery of quality mental health care can do the same once the fighting ends."

Rep. Ramstad introduced The Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act (H.R. 1424) earlier this year to ensure greater access to mental health care and substance use treatment.

In addition, U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith, R-Oregon, gave welcoming remarks at the Congressional luncheon, which is part of SPAN USA's annual national awareness and training event, "Building Hope for the Future," in Washington D.C. to raise awareness about the toll of suicide and the need for suicide prevention initiatives.

More information about the four-day event is available at www.spanusa.org/spate.

NOTE: To schedule an interview with SPAN USA Executive Director Jerry Reed, please contact Melanie Fonder at (202) 715-1568 or melanie.fonder@dittus.com.

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SPAN USA is the nation's only suicide prevention organization dedicated to leveraging grassroots support among suicide survivors and others to advance public policies that prevent suicide. Since its founding nine 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, please visit www.spanusa.org.

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