benefits, higher education, business licenses in about 2 dozen fields, and even the right of self-defense.

Mr. Speaker, I call on the House to pass H.R. 274 to show that this chamber and our Nation support the Baha’i people and stand with them in the face of Iran’s tyranny.

PROSTATE CANCER DISPARITY

(Mr. PAYNE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Speaker, this morning I met with the Prostate Health Education Network and leaders from across the country who are on the frontlines of the fight against prostate cancer.

It is critical for African American men and their families that leaders like us raise awareness and funding to end the racial disparity in prostate cancer research.

African American men are more likely to get prostate cancer, are diagnosed at more advanced stages, and are twice as likely to die as our Caucasian counterparts.

Fighting cancer requires sustained efforts at all levels to raise awareness to ensure individuals and their families have quality and affordable access to screening and treatment.

It is critical that Congress continues putting resources toward ending racial disparity in prostate cancer and healthcare more generally.

THANKING MEMBERS OF CONGRESS FOR EXPRESSING THEIR CONCERN

(Ms. FOXX asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, the public often has the impression that we in Congress are not caring people who work together on issues. I want to say to the American people that in the last few days, you could not find a group of people more concerned about their fellow Members than we have been.

We know this hurricane is hitting North Carolina, it is likely to hit South Carolina and possibly Georgia, and I want people to know how much I appreciate Members on both sides of the aisle who have come up to me to ask what impact this is going to have on me, on my district, on the people of my district, and on North Carolina in general.

It is very heartwarming to have those concerns expressed. People have said, “We are praying for you.”

I know that is the case throughout the country, but I want to particularly say to all of my colleagues—I thank them all personally—but to all of my colleagues, those who haven’t spoken to me directly, to other Members, thank you very much for your concerns and prayers. I certainly will pass those along to my constituents, but I think it is important that people know we care a great deal about each other and we express that to each other.

SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MAST). Under the Speaker’s announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentlewoman from Arizona (Ms. SINEMA) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. SINEMA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of our country’s veterans, who make great sacrifices to keep America safe.

When they return home from service, it is our responsibility to ensure they receive the care and support of a grateful Nation. For far too many veterans, that responsibility is not fulfilled. The government’s failure has tragic consequences for those struggling with mental health illnesses.

September is Suicide Prevention Month. Americans across the country take time to raise awareness about the tragedy of suicide. We lose an estimated 20 veterans to suicide each day, and each death is unforgivable.

Every year since I have been in Congress, we have brought together Republicans and Democrats to draw attention to veteran suicide and send a clear message that this epidemic must end.

Honoring our commitment to veterans is not a partisan issue. We know the only way to achieve real, lasting change for our Nation’s bravest men and women is to bring both parties together to solve this problem.

Today, Members from both sides of the aisle have joined me to bring awareness to veteran suicide and we are working together to find solutions. I know we can make bipartisan progress, because we have done it before. We have shown it is possible for both parties to work together to improve veterans’ mental healthcare.

After hearing the tragic story of a young Arizona veteran who lost his life to suicide in 2013, my team worked across the aisle to pass a bill that improved lifesaving VA mental health services for veterans with classified experience. It took 3 years of hard work, but our bill is now law, and it helps veterans successfully transition to civilian life.

It is important progress, but there is still so much work left to do.

We must serve our bravest men and women, just as they have served us.

We challenge the VA, the Department of Defense, and our fellow lawmakers to join us in confronting the tragedy of veteran suicide. We must do more to honor our commitment to American’s veterans.

Today and every day, we stand with military families who have lost a loved one to the tragedy of suicide, and we stand shoulder to shoulder with all Americans who will not be forgotten. We will not stop until every veteran receives the care that he or she needs.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. FITZPATRICK), my friend and colleague, and I am grateful to be joined this afternoon in this Special Order for his comments.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak of a solemn topic, one almost too large to fit into this chamber, but our bill is now law, and it helps more to honor our commitment to veterans’ community and for hosting this Special Order.

Mr. Speaker, our nation’s veterans are our finest citizens, to whom we owe the most. Their sacrifice in defense of freedom allows us to stand here today in this chamber, a testament to our values and a symbol of hope.

All too often, we see our Nation’s veterans struggle upon their return home. Issues with depression, substance abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder serve as constant reminders of the price they paid to protect our way of life.

Tragically, we have seen a rising percentage of these heroes resorting to suicide to end their own suffering. This epidemic is beyond unacceptable and statistics paint a grim picture of this epidemic.

Between 2005 and 2015, Mr. Speaker, suicide rates for all veterans increased by 25 percent—25 percent between 2005 and 2013. Additionally, veterans account for nearly 15 percent of suicides in U.S. adults.

Mr. Speaker, we can do better, and we must do better. I am proud to stand here today with my colleagues in solidarity against veteran suicide. I am thankful for the establishment of the third Veterans Crisis Line call center to provide guidance, support, and critical resources to those in need. While steps are being taken to prevent veteran suicide, we still have a long way to go because one hero’s death is one too many.

As Congresswoman KYRSTEN SINEMA had pointed out, Mr. Speaker, September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, but this issue will continue to transcend any time frame. For those who sacrificed for us, we owe them and will continue to fight to eradicate this public health crisis of veteran suicide.

Mr. Speaker, I want to, once again, thank Congresswoman SINEMA for hosting this Special Order.

Ms. SINEMA. Mr. Speaker, for many veterans, the return to civilian life can feel overwhelming. Ensuring enough community support and mental health resources are available is essential and urgent.

We recently heard from Andrew, who lives in Chandler, Arizona. He joined the Marine Corps at 17 years old when he said he was “full of motivation and excitement” to serve. “I wanted to do my part to protect America,” Andrew said.

As an antitank assaultman, Andrew fought beside incredible marines in Iraq, and when he finally returned
home, he said he returned with memo-
ries of death. Andrew leaned on loved
ones and his faith to pull him out of his
darkness.

Ever since, he has continued his heal-
ing journey by serving his fellow vet-
erns. He presses forward with the val-
or of Abraham Lincoln, we, as a country,
lieve that he was experiencing what we
now know to be PTSD.

We understand so much more today
about the brain and the impact of trau-
ma that so many of our servicemem-
bers endure, and it is critical that the
VA and our society use that knowledge
will not have the same pain as those in
their closest friends that they could
earlier speak about his experiences dur-

POW camp. When I was a child, he
was shot down in the Battle of the

of divisiveness in Washington.

of the few bipartisan issues in this era
have made a solemn vow to care for

a price. Our men and women in uni-
Corps: honor, courage, and commit-
tion.

Responsibility to care for our vet-

There are veterans like Andrew who
used their experiences, struggles, and
accomplishments to help fellow vet-

There are veterans like Andrew who
were flocking to those who inter-

to veteran wants

about the fact that their veteran wants

about the brain and the impact of trau-

waves of war receive the attention
they deserve. Many of us today voted
to fund mental health and suicide preven-
tion programs. And while it is commendable that Congress is
taking important steps to address this
issue, much more needs to be done to
ensure that no veteran ever is left behind.

As a member of the Veterans’ Affairs
Committee, I fight for the men and
women who fight for our country. Dur-

of suicide Awareness Prevention
Month, we should all pledge to work
together to ensure that no veteran ever
has trouble accessing the mental

health services that he or she needs

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentle-
woman from New Hampshire (Ms.
KUSTER), my friend.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentle-
woman from Arizona, K YRSTEN
SINEMA, for her commitment to this
issue. She was very effective in the test-

her perseverance.

Ms. SINEMA. Mr. Speaker, I yield to
the gentleman from Florida (Mr.
MAST), my friend and colleague. I
thank him so much for the work that he has done to join us
today. I appreciate it.

Mr. MAST. Mr. Speaker, I guess I
found in my time that suicide is an epi-
demic of purpose, and worth, and value.

I come to this line of thought be-
cause I have had countless veterans
call me; reach out to my office; find me
on Facebook; find me on some other
form of social media; had a member of
their family call my office or reach
out, and talk about the fact that their veteran wants
to take their life.

And in seeing that play out time
and time again, I realize each and every
time that somebody is out there
searching for their value in their life.
They are searching for where is their
value? Where is their worth to the rest
of the world? And for me, that helps me
to recognize that this can be prevented.

I think veterans face this challenge
in a way that we as a country face it,
in an elevated way, not because the challenge of war
or recovering from injury is something
that cannot be overcome. I think most
of us end up finding in our lives that
when we have overcome something in-
credibly difficult, those are the most
memorable and purposeful moments of
our life.

No person, veteran included, should
have to believe that their greatest con-
tribution to the world, or to their Na-
tion, or to their family, or their com-

To be the best that they can be,

That is something that is especially
difficult for a veteran to overcome be-
because their worth, and their value, and
their work every single day was tied di-
rectly to serving all of those things at
the highest possible level, serving their
brothers and their sisters to their left
and right, knowing that on any given
day, they might have the opportunity
to face one of them.

That willingness of what we would
go out there and do for one another on the
battlefield has no time limit on it, has
no fuse. It will never be a wick that
burns down. That has to be our com-

That is the difficult challenge that
we find ourselves trying to overcome.
In having so many veterans reach out
to me, I have learned this about vet-

If they didn't tell, they wouldn't
have said that there was nothing I could do,
if somebody else didn't reach out to
them. Because I could have not known
anybody else that they could have told,
that they didn't tell, they wouldn't have
done it.

It is in that that I believe it is impor-
tant that we as veterans make a com-
mitment to one another about being
there for one another; about the fact
that we had an oath that we never
leave a fallen comrade. We always used
to say, we always place the mission
first, and that mission doesn't end when
we take off that uniform. That
mission, that commitment to one an-
other, has to continue.

And that is why I believe that it is
important that we as veterans make
a commitment to one another; that we are never going to let
one of our brothers or sisters be left be-
hind; that our commitment to one an-
other never ends; that we are never
gonna go out of our way to bring
harm to themselves; that our love for
each other never ends.

And that is why I believe that it is
important that we as veterans make
that commitment to one another; that we are never going to let
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each other never ends.
find in my life toward helping with this one veteran, one person at a time, one commitment at a time, a commitment that never ends, and a commitment that has no limits to it.

I believe all of our veterans want that and are capable of that. And I am proud of everyone of them for that commitment that I know they have inside of them.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Arizona (Ms. SINEMA) for holding this Special Order.

Ms. SINEMA. Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment to thank my colleague and friend, Congressman MAST. While he spoke very eloquently about his fellow veterans, and commitment to service, and leaving no man behind, he is very humble, and didn’t share all of his own experiences.

Congressman MAST served as a staff sergeant in the United States Army and has earned a Bronze Star, Purple Heart, and many other awards for his bravery during his service. And when Congressman MAST joined Congress, I will never forget the first time we had a few moments to spend together, and I asked him about his own experiences in the military and since then, and the changes that happened in his life after he was injured in battle defending our country.

I will never forget Congressman MAST’s response, which is one of such strength and character, and, I believe, provides such inspiration to other men and women in our country, both those in uniform and those who have returned to civilian life as veterans.

I want to thank him for his service and for his incredible dedication to helping his fellow men and women who have returned home from battle as well.

Earlier in our Special Order, I mentioned the story of a young veteran in my district. His name was Sergeant Daniel Somers. Sergeant Somers was an Army veteran of two tours in Iraq. He served on Task Force Lightning, an intelligence unit. He ran over 400 combat missions as a machine gunner in the turret of a Humvee. Part of his role required him to interrogate dozens of terror suspects. His work was deemed classified.

Like many veterans, Daniel was haunted by the war when he returned home. He suffered from flashbacks, nightmares, depression, and additional symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, made worse by a traumatic brain injury. Daniel needed help.

He and his family asked for help, but, unfortunately, the VA enrolled Sergeant Somers in group therapy sessions, which he could not attend for fear of disclosing classified information.

Despite requests for individualized counseling, or some other reasonable accommodation to allow Sergeant Somers to receive appropriate care for his PTSD, the VA delayed providing Sergeant Somers with support and appropriate care.

Like many, Sergeant Somers’ isolation got worse when he transitioned to civilian life. He tried to provide for his family, but he was unable to work due to his disability. Sergeant Somers struggled with the VA bureaucracy. His disability appeal had been pending for more than 2 years in the system without resolution. Sergeant Somers did not get the help he needed in time.

On June 10, 2013, Sergeant Somers wrote a letter to his family. I share a part of his letter every year here on the floor, in memory of Daniel’s pain and in love for his family. In this letter, Daniel said: “I am not getting better. I am not going to get better, and I will most certainly deteriorate further as time goes on.”

He goes on to say: “I am left with basically nothing. Too trapped in a war to be at peace, too damaged to be at war, what is left of me would take the easy route, and a liability to those who stick it out—and thus deserve better. So you see, not only am I better off dead, but the world is better without me in it.”

“This has brought me to my actual final mission.”

No one who returns home from serving our country should ever feel like he or she has nowhere to turn, which is why I am committed to continuing to work on both sides of the aisle to ensure that no veteran ever feels trapped like Sergeant Somers did and that all of our veterans have access to appropriate mental healthcare.

But Sergeant Somers’ story is too familiar to many military families. His parents, Howard and Jean, were devastated by the loss of their son, but they bravely shared Sergeant Somers’ story and created a mission of their own.

Their mission is to ensure that their son’s memory brought to light America’s deadliest war: the 20 veterans that we lose every day to suicide.

Many of my colleagues here in Washington have met with Howard and Jean. They are working with Congress and the VA to share their experiences with the VA healthcare system and find ways to improve care for veterans and their families.

We worked very closely with Howard and Jean to help sign into law the Sergeant Daniel Somers Classified Veterans Access to Care Act. This is a law that ensures that veterans like Daniel, who have had classified or sensitive experiences, can access appropriate mental health services at the VA.

Our law directs the Secretary of the VA to establish standards and procedures to ensure that any veteran who participated in classified missions or served in a classified setting may access mental healthcare that fully accommodates his or her obligation to not improperly disclose classified information.

Despite requests for individualized counseling, or some other reasonable accommodation to allow Sergeant Somers to receive appropriate care for his PTSD, the VA delayed providing Sergeant Somers with support and appropriate care.

The law also directs the Secretary to disseminate guidance to employees of the Veterans Health Administration, including mental health professionals, on standards and procedures about how to best engage veterans during the course of their mental health treatment with respect to classified information.

Finally, our law directs the Secretary to allow veterans with classified experiences to self-identify, so they can quickly receive care in an appropriate setting.

But that victory is just one small step forward. We still have so much work left to do.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for joining us this evening to talk about the scourge of veteran suicide. This is our sixth year of hosting this Special Order in a bipartisan way together. I look forward to the year when we do not need this Special Order because we have ended the crisis of veteran suicide in our country.

Until such time, I pledge to continue working with my colleagues to not just tell the stories of veterans who are struggling, veterans we have made it, but veterans we have lost but to celebrate our victory of overcoming this crisis and ending this scourge.

Mr. Speaker, I yield the balance of my time to the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. HILL), my friend, who is going to share some of his thoughts and close out our Special Order hour. I thank Congressman HILL for joining us this evening.

Mr. HILL. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Arizona (Ms. SINEMA), my good friend, for yielding.

She and I have the pleasure of serving on the House Financial Services Committee together and cooperating on many legislative measures and regulatory measures that benefit our economy, so I thank her for that work. I greatly appreciate her stepping up and reaching out across the aisle on the subject of suicide, particularly during Suicide Prevention Month, and letting all of us have an opportunity to share our perspective on this national tragedy.

Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. There is an average of 123 suicides per day. What could be more tragic than that?

Yet, I don’t see nearly the people on the floor tonight that there should be, because this affects all our districts so tragically. One in five adults suffering with the forms of mental illness in our country, a problem that has disrupted so many families, caused too much violence and pain, and caused far too many lives. Representative SINEMA and I talk about this every time the subject comes up.

When I was a high school senior, I can’t remember a friend that was a victim of suicide. But, Mr. Speaker, my kids just turned 19 and 21, and within 4 or 5 years of their ages, I can think of six families who have lost a child to suicide—different reasons, same tragedy. So our families are hurting from the scourge of suicide.
In Congress, this is an area where we work together, the 21st Century Cures Act, where we attacked the first comprehensive approach to mental illness treatment in decades, where we say we want people with mental illness and who want treatment to get it. We worked together, most recently on the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention Act for American veterans, and the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act—small steps, but concrete steps that call attention to suicide, particularly in our communities.

The VA is helping on this issue and marked Suicide Prevention Month with its Be There campaign. This campaign highlights the risk factors and warning signs for suicide, provides information about VA mental health and suicide prevention resources, and helps individuals and organizations start the conversation around veteran mental health in their communities.

Our VA employees must have the necessary tools to offer guidance to veterans while providing essential suicide prevention services.

This is a together thing. This is an “all of us in this together” thing.

Mr. Speaker, I have a chair in my front yard with a small painting of the Little Rock that was hand-painted to raise money for suicide awareness and suicide prevention. On that chair, it says: “We Are The 22.” This is a non-profit organization in my community started by veterans helping veterans, because it is not an “us and they” thing. It is an “us” thing. It is a “we” thing.

We are all in this together. We are the 22, the number that we have as the estimate of veterans who are taking their own lives.

So I want to echo the Speaker pro tempore this afternoon, a distinguished American and distinguished veteran and brave, heroic representative of our Armed forces, a living symbol of the patriots, the people who defend our liberties, when he said we don’t leave people behind. We don’t leave a sailor, a marine, or a soldier on the battlefield. We bring them home.

Just last week, we honored John McCain on the floor of this House. And SAM JOHNSON, leaving the House this year—Representative SCHWEIKERT was there—he was in the Hanoi Hilton with John McCain. We don’t leave a man or woman behind on the battlefield. But when they come home, we equally should not leave them behind.

I really commend the Speaker’s comments that the mission is not over. All of us have that partnership and sense of duty to carry that mission forward on the home front when we are out of harm’s way and out of theater.

To me, it is that buddy system that we all learn, whether it is in boot camp or swim team, you team up; you check in on each other; you don’t leave people alone. That is the secret, I think, to preventing suicide.

I lost a good friend of mine, a fraternity brother, a partner in a law firm in Houston, Texas. He never once intimated to his wife, to his children, or to his law partners that anything was wrong, and they got the call that he had been found.

Check in: How are you doing? So we are the 22. We are on the buddy system. We don’t leave our warriors behind. The mission continues here. All those things are true.

I carry in my wallet, Mr. Speaker, the veterans crisis hotline as a reminder to me that we want our veterans to reach out if there is a moment of crisis.

If somebody is watching this or hearing the words of brave BRIAN MAST, or the emotional content and leadership of Representative KYRSTEN SINEMA from Arizona, and you are having that moment now as a veteran, I urge you to call 1-800-273-8255 for yourself, for a friend, for a neighbor.

We, in Congress, are fighting to make sure that veterans hotline is a value, that it is answered, and that we never leave one behind. That is the thin thread of connectivity between all of us that keeps us right on the moment.

Mr. Speaker, I see my friend from Arizona is here. It was a pleasure to have both of my friends from Arizona talk about this last week, about the gentleman John McCain, and what he meant to each of us and what he has meant to our country.

Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to yield to the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. SCHWEIKERT) my friend, now on the House Ways and Means Committee, formerly of the best committee in the House, the House Financial Services Committee.

Mr. SCHWEIKERT. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. HILL for yielding. And to the gentlewoman from Arizona, I thank her for doing this every year.

This is one of those moments where you are walking toward the microphone because we just got out of votes today. This is a year, a month, a week, since the passing of John McCain, and we are sort of discussing in your head whether you ultimately tell the personal story. I have two I want to share.

My reason for doing this is, if someone is watching, we have someone in our life, and you are having self-destructive thoughts, please, please reach out, get the help, and understand the devastation that happens and the pain that happens when someone takes their life.

My two stories. When I very first got elected in the Phoenix-Scottsdale area, one of the very first constituent meetings I had was with a mom. Her son had been part of the Phoenix VA. She always felt that the prescriptions he was given put him into an emotional spiral. They kept trying to get him mental health services. They felt all that he was receiving was more prescriptions and a future date for mental health services. And he took his life.

That mother, the pain, the tears, the crushing blow, what the loss of her son’s life meant to that family.

I believe now, a few years later, the Phoenix VA is better. They have learned a lot, they understand how to be almost a quick reaction force in helping an individual. But we need to make sure these things never happen again.

Now for the personal one that I have never told in public.

I was born in an unwed mothers’ home in L.A. I was adopted. It turns out the gentleman who adopted me had multiple sclerosis. But he was a veteran, and he was receiving his medical treatments from VA.

This is a long, long time ago, but this is about the pain that comes when a veteran takes his or her life.

Because of the pharmaceuticals he was given, the lack of emotional counseling, and the failure to properly diagnose his disease, he put himself in a car in a garage, turned on the motor, and took his life. That was my dad.

Some time later, my mother remarried Mr. Schweikert. I got readopted. So I am blessed to grow up in a wonderful household that had brought me to Arizona.

Many years later when I was a young adult, my mom sat me down and told me the story. You could tell there was still that burning hole in her heart of finding her husband, my dad, dead in that car, having taken his own life, believing it was the failure of the very services he was receiving from the VA.

Now it is decades later, and I believe we have learned a lot. This body has tried as hard as it can to get their heads around: Are we allowing too many pharmaceuticals to be prescribed? Are we not providing emotional services? Do we need to put resources into having that communal get-together, the quick reaction force? I believe it is getting better.

But understand the pain that Mom shared with me when I was first elected about the loss of her son. Even these many, many years later, it is still part of our family’s legacy of that pain. If this body can do anything, if we can find ways to make that pain come to an end, then we will have done something very honorable and very powerful.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. HILL for yielding to me.

Mr. HILL. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Arizona for participating, and I thank his colleague, Representative SINEMA, for her heartfelt tribute that she has carried on since she has been in the House to bring attention to suicide prevention.

I also commend the House for the efforts that it has taken on mental health and on suicide prevention, particularly for our veterans.

Ms. SINEMA. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

HONORING THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF RON ROBINSON

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker’s announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. HILL) is recognized for 60