part of the Jim Crow era—I went to a baseball game, an exhibition baseball game. And I was on crutches because I had polio. I had a Chicago White Sox cap on and a Chicago White Sox T-shirt.

A player came to give me a baseball from the opposing team, the St. Louis Cardinals. I thanked him. And I went and told my father. And we came down to thank him. And he said: ''Don't thank me. Thank that player over there.'' He was the blackest player on the field, number nine, Minnie Minoso. He didn't feel comfortable in 1955 to give me a baseball. Yet he was the player with the most compassionate heart and humility on the field because that was the segregated South.

Minnie Minoso became my hero, and I followed his career and became friends with him. We exchanged gifts. He came to Memphis, and I went to Chicago.

In 1960 when he came to Memphis, he was staying at the Lorraine Motel—the segregated African American hotel in Memphis—because African Cuban Latin players, African Americans weren't allowed at the Peabody Hotel, where the other players were.

I couldn't believe that my baseball hero, a great all-star, was staying at the Lorraine, which happens to be where Dr. King was murdered. But that is where he had to stay.

I learned about segregation from living in Memphis and from being befriended by Minnie Minoso. The insanity of segregation and the separation of people by race, that period of Jim Crow and previous slavery—which existed in this country for 250 years of slavery and 100-and-some-odd years of Jim Crow—still pervades this country.

There are lingering consequences which must be dealt with. The gentleman from California (Mr. SCHIFF) well addressed them. Much must be done in law enforcement and criminal justice but also in education and opportunities for jobs, which people don't have today in the South and many other places, in inner cities.

So as I think about Minnie Minoso, and I think about segregation and the effect that it has had on America—America's original sin was slavery. We haven't overcome it.

Some write about it and get recognition. People read their books. Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote in the Atlantic. Edward Baptist has written a book about the benefits that America got from the slave trade and how many people made money from it shipping cotton, making clothes, insuring the slave trade. It was the great economic benefit of this country and made this country great, all on slavery. Edward Baptist writes it well.

Michelle Alexander writes in ''The New Jim Crow'' about the incarceration rate of African Americans, that it is wrongfully high. If you are African American, the likelihood that you are going to be arrested and incarcerated is so much greater than a Caucasian for living in the same society and doing the same things.

We must put an end to discrimination in all its forms and fashions. In the criminal justice system, sentencing reform needs to take place. In the criminal justice system, we need to see that law enforcement agencies and prosecutions of law enforcement officers are done transparently and fairly and justly.

We need to be sure that Americans continue to have faith that this is the land of the free and the home of the brave, and that our Nation is one in which people get equal justice, as was planned by our Founding Fathers but was never quite implemented.

VETERANS MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Alabama (Mrs. ROBY) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. ROBY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss mental health services for veterans.

As you know, physical injuries are not the only ones endured in war. Many soldiers return home with wounds that we cannot see. For some veterans, the psychological trauma endured on the battlefield affects them and their families long after the shots stop firing.

□ 1030

Of the 2 million Americans who served in combat in Iraq or Afghanistan, as many as 300,000 meet criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder. Another 300,000 may have suffered a traumatic brain injury.

Mr. Speaker, for these servicemen and servicewomen, access to quality mental health care is crucial, so imagine being one of these soldiers who recently returned home with the lasting psychological effects that so commonly result from war.

Now, imagine that in seeking treatment from the VA, you are forced to go 67 days without an appointment. Sixty-seven days is the new average wait time for new mental health patients at the central Alabama VA; and, Mr. Speaker, that number has gotten worse. In May, the wait time for new mental health patients was 57 days.

Mr. Speaker, administrators claim that scheduling and labeling errors have contributed to making the problem appear worse on paper than it actually is, but if after all of this time we haven't figured out how to properly schedule patients at the VA, we have worse problems than I thought. I don't expect it to magically improve overnight, but we shouldn't be moving in the wrong direction.

My primary focus is improving care for veterans in Alabama, and there are ways that we can do it. I am eager to see greater utilization of the Patient-Centered Community Care program, otherwise known as PC3, which connects veteran patients with local doctors or specialists.

It makes no sense to make a veteran wait 2 months for an appointment when we can refer them to an outside provider right away. I believe PC3 is a difference-maker, and I will continue to insist the VA leadership utilize it on the mental health side.

Mr. Speaker, a 2-month wait for mental health patients at the VA is obviously a disservice to our veterans, but it is also a major safety concern for veterans, their families, and the public. It might be uncomfortable to talk about, but the fact is we have a very high suicide rate among veterans.

Twenty-two veterans commit suicide every day. The tendency is even higher for young, male veterans, the very type that are returning home right now from war. The last thing that we should do is make it harder for veterans to get the treatment that they need.

That is why I rise today in support of H.R. 5059, the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention Act. This bipartisan bill aims to, number one, increase access to mental health care for veterans; number two, better meet the demand for mental health professionals; and number three, improve accountability of suicide prevention efforts through the Department of Defense and the VA.

The bill is named for Clay Hunt, a Marine veteran who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, earning the Purple Heart. He was diagnosed with PTSD and actually worked to raise awareness about problems facing people like him returning home from combat.

Like many veterans, Clay ran into roadblocks in his efforts to access care for his PTSD. I encourage everyone to look up Clay Hunt's full story and read about the difficulty he faced getting needed care from the VA. For some veterans, it might sound all too familiar. On March 31, 2011, at the age of 28, Clay took his own life. Clay's story is sad, it is disheartening, and it is infuriating. But what Clay's story is not? It is not uncommon enough, 22 veterans a day.

Mr. Speaker, we have a long way to go as a Nation in making sure veterans in need of mental health care aren't left behind, but let's start this week by passing the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention Act.

HONORING PALO ALTO COLLEGE IN SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GALLEGO) for 5 minutes.

Mr. GALLEGO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Palo Alto College on the famed south side of San Antonio. Making a high impact through education, Palo Alto College has been meeting the needs of first generation college students in the San Antonio area and in the surrounding communities.

In doing so, Palo Alto College prepares students for a 4-year degree program or to enter the workforce with