

Congressman Pat Ryan HVAC Member Day Remarks:

- Thank you, Chairman Bost and Ranking Member Takano for providing us with the opportunity to testify today

- As you develop policies for the 118th Congress, I encourage you to draw from a principle I learned as a young officer: it is essential to get resources to the people on the ground who are doing the critical, day-to-day work. In the 118th Congress, I request that the Committee prioritize programs that direct the VA to maximize the success of our community VAMCs, non-profits, and VSOs. I urge you to send steady resources to organizations, especially those organizations in the Hudson Valley that provide quality, consistent care for our veterans.

- Castle Point:
 - Hudson Valley Veterans need to know that our community will always take care of them. Nothing is more essential to that care than Castle Point VA Medical Center

 - Last year, veterans faced confusion and uncertainty as reforms instituted by the VA MISSION Act threatened the closure of Castle Point.

 - This was an unacceptable proposal and I ask the Committee to ensure that no veterans will see a reduction in health care access.

 - I support efforts to update VA health care facilities and provide the best care possible for our veterans, but that can't come at the expense of misguided policies or loss of care.

 - Our veterans deserve to know that the care they receive at Castle Point will be there tomorrow, next month, and next year.

- Scaling Local Programs:
 - I'd also like to bring the committee's attention to local programs that could benefit veterans across the nation, if brought to scale.

 - One such program is the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer Support Program, which started in New York in 2012.

- It cannot be that in the United States of America, veterans returning home do not have access to adequate mental health care.
- The Dwyer Program plugs the gap, offering peer-to-peer counseling for veterans suffering from PTSD or TBI and any veteran looking to reintegrate into civilian society.
- If properly resourced, efforts like the Dwyer Program can save veteran lives. It's that simple. As Ulster County Executive, I recognized that success and fought to bring the program to Ulster, where it has flourished since.
- I encourage the Committee to support the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Program Act, which would bring this successful New York pilot program to communities across the country.
- Another excellent program is the Hudson Valley National Center for Veteran Reintegration, which works to give veterans the tools they need to survive and thrive in civilian life.
- Much like the Dwyer program, this is a successful model of care and support for veterans that should serve as a guiding light for the Committee as they set policy.
- It's through these innovative programs that take evidence-based principles and apply them to local communities, that we will be able to reduce veteran suicide and ensure all veterans can integrate comfortably and safely into civilian life.
- Commend the VA and Expand Programs
 - The Committee should also direct to VA to maximize the success of existing grant programs like the Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program which has benefited organizations in Dutchess County, in my district.
 - The SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program enables the VA to provide resources to community-based suicide prevention efforts

such as screenings and referrals, assistance with VA benefits, and therapy programming.

- The tested, evidence-based non-profits and VSOs in our communities need predictable funding streams and the knowledge they will be able to operate in a community and expand their footprint for years to come.
- It's wonderful to see these programs change veterans' lives for the better, but we must act with urgency to help veterans that have not yet been reached and ensure that steady funding can continue for successful nonprofits so that they can provide for those who fought for us. I look forward to working with you on these efforts and I thank you for the opportunity to testify today.
- Thank you and I yield back.