

April 24, 2014

Opening Statement of Congresswoman Kyrsten Sinema

O&I Subcommittee Hearing on “Access to Mental Health Care and Traumatic Brain Injury Services: Addressing the Challenges and Barriers for Veterans”

Thank you Chairman Coffman and Ranking Member Kirkpatrick for allowing me to participate today and for holding this hearing in Arizona.

Chairman Coffman, thank you for coming to our state. We have a proud military tradition here and this issue is very important to us.

Congresswoman Kirkpatrick, you are a great champion for Arizona’s veterans and I am glad you brought the Veterans Affairs Committee to Arizona to hear directly from our veterans.

Thank you for holding a hearing on this important topic: Veterans’ access to mental health care and traumatic brain injury services.

Finally, thank you to our panelists. Thank you for your service to our country, your sacrifice and for your advocacy for our nation’s veterans.

Our state has a proud history of military service and it is critical that our returning veterans have access to appropriate care.

Traumatic brain injury and mental health wounds are the signature wounds of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but previous generations of veterans also have these wounds.

Ensuring access to care is critical, but while resources and attention are now more focused, too many of our veterans are not getting the support they need.

Tragically, 22 veterans lose their lives to suicide every day. This is unacceptable.

I am also disturbed and concerned by the allegations at the Phoenix VA Medical Center that delays in care may have caused the deaths of Arizona veterans. We need to get to the bottom of this and hold accountable those responsible.

This battle cannot be one that is fought by our veterans alone, or by their families or by the VA.

We have to work together as a community and as a country to end this tragedy.

No veteran should feel they have no place to turn and no family should lose their loved one after he or she returns home.

Again, thank you Chairman Coffman and Ranking Member Kirkpatrick for holding this hearing and for your leadership.

And thank you to our panelists for sharing your very personal stories and for working to help other veterans and military families.