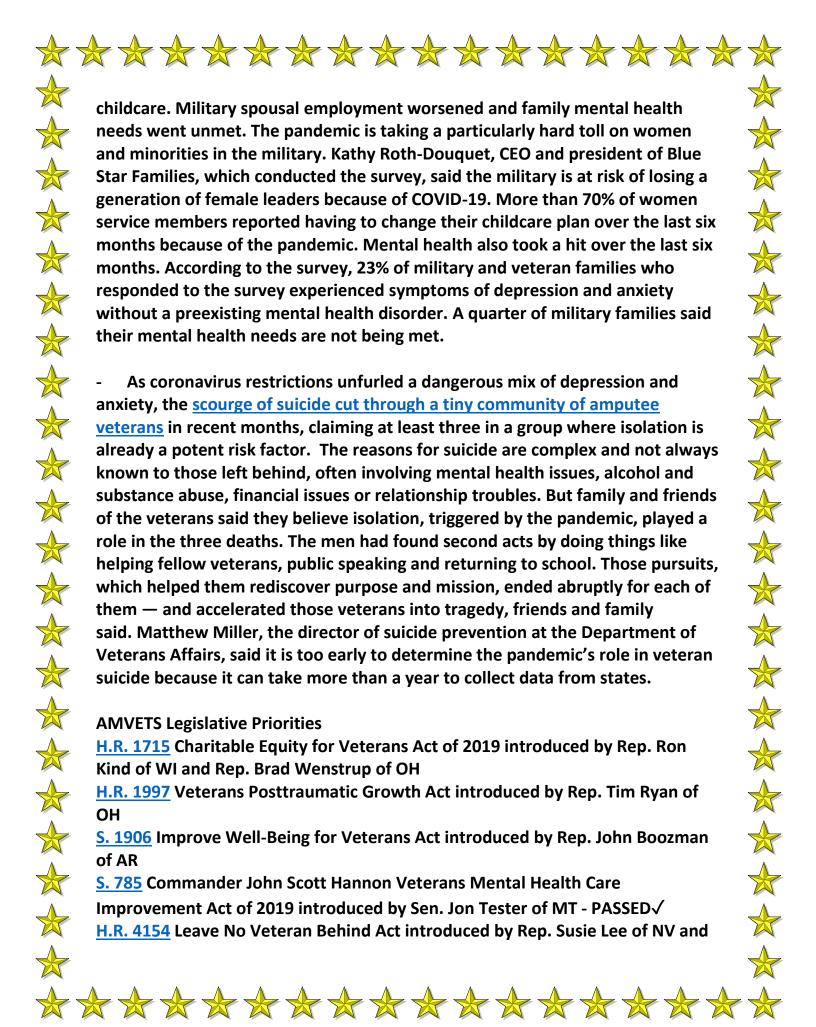
## AMVETS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE OCTOBER 26, 2020

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**News Driving the Week** 

- The Department of Veterans Affairs' annual report on veteran suicides is a month late compared to last year, and department officials so far aren't saying when it will be released. House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Mark Takano sent a letter to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie, saying he was "dismayed" that the report was delayed since the department usually releases it during Suicide Prevention Awareness Month each September. Connecting Vets previously asked VA about the yearly report when it was not released as expected, but did not receive a response until Oct. 20, when Press Secretary Christina Noel said in an email that the department "is still finalizing its annual suicide data report and will be releasing it this year. A release date has not been set yet." VA's 2019 report found that on average, about 17 veterans died by suicide per day in 2017. That number has remained the same or worsened in recent years despite increased spending and programs aimed at helping.
- Officials for the Department of <u>Veterans Affairs declined to participate in a Senate hearing</u> about the progress in implementing the Mission Act, a law passed two years ago to help improve health care for veterans. In a letter to Moran, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said the Senate committee did not give the agency enough notice of the Mission Act hearing. The letter states the VA was notified of the hearing on Oct. 15. "I'm very disappointed the administration chose not to participate. I do not know why something as important as implementation as the Mission Act doesn't rise to that important to the VA. Hopefully it's not because they're campaigning across the country," said Sen. Jon Tester of Montana, the ranking Democrat on the veterans' affairs committee. "The legislative branch isn't here as a nuisance. We actually do things and have expectations."
- A new survey paints a bleak picture of <u>military life during the COVID-19</u> <u>pandemic</u>, highlighting how the effects of the disease widened existing cracks in needs and benefits coverage for service members. Over the past six months, 20% of essential service members, like medical providers, were unable to access

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