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Veterans Struggling With Thoughts of Suicide Encouraged to Seek Help

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Veterans Day Parade on St. Croix (Nov. 11, 2022) By. KGP/V.I. CONSORTIUM

As well-wishers huddled on St. Croix on Friday afternoon to honor the sacrifices of U.S. veterans and victims of wars, an unsettling but necessary message permeated through the crowd of people.

The word “suicide” was louder than the intermittent rains that ever so often competed with speakers’ celebratory remarks at the Veterans Day Parade.

It was an important part of 1st Vice Commander of the American Legion Department of Puerto Rico, Carmen Rosario’s keynote address to veterans, their families and government officials, who had gathered for the second time that day in remembrance of veterans of the U.S Virgin Islands and by extension the United States.

“The stigma of seeking help needs to end ... Veterans value courage and it takes courage to ask for help,” she declared.

According to Ms. Rosario, the suicide rates among veterans are 50 percent higher than that of the general population (non-veteran adults). She said this was due to the stigma associated with asking for help.

“If we are going to stop suicide it is crucial that we look at this issue much differently than prior generations. If we wait for someone to make an attempt before we reach out, there is a very good chance that it will be too late,” she said.

The community she notes also has a vital role to play in preventing suicides among its war heroes. She advised them to be proactive and to encourage veterans to seek help before it is too late.

Her association also works to maintain bonds among veterans in an effort to improve their chances of mental wellness when they return to their communities after their service on the battlefield has ended.

The 2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report shows a decrease in suicide rates among veterans. In 2020, there were 6,146 Veteran suicide deaths, which was 343 fewer than in 2019. But the report noted that much more could be done.

Perhaps, a way for communities to show support is to increase their presence on Veterans Day and Memorial Day – a call which came from Commander Secundino Roman-Cruz, Commander at the American District Legion District #10.

Assessing the grounds, he noted that “this is a very fair crowd,” commenting that in the past he always complained about Veterans Day and Memorial Day Parade because his association had to struggle to get people to join in the celebrations.

Earlier that day, a group of well-wishers also congregated on St Thomas where Senate President Donna A. Frett Gregory expressed her gratitude for generations of veterans who continue to work to keep the United States safe from war.

"It is a debt that can never be paid but we can ensure that those of you who have secured our liberties are treated with due respect and are provided with the resources needed when you have completed your tour," she noted.

Ms. Frett-Gregory also recognized the families of veterans who she described as "every day heroes."

"It is your families that shoulder the burden of sacrifice. The love and support families give to all of us, supports the backbone of this nation and this Virgin Islands," she said.

Expressions of thanks were preferred on those veterans present who would have left their families and friends to protect their country.

“You are among our nation’s elite; the less than one percent of America that joins the military,” Dr. Muria N. Nesbitt, U.S Department of Veterans Affairs Readjustment Counselor told them.

“For the scars you now wear both visible and invisible the nation can never repay you,” she added.

Words of commendation also came from Senate Vice President, Senator Novelle Francis as well as Governor Albert Bryan Jr.

While Mr. Francis thanked veterans for “unselfishly placing their lives on the line for freedom,” Mr. Bryan beacons Virgin Islanders to recognize the many freedoms that they now enjoy is because of the sacrifices of veterans.

Congresswoman Stacey E. Plaskett was represented on St. Croix by Kendia Riviera, the Military and Veteran Liaison for the Office of Ms. Plaskett.

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