

# US Supreme Court refuses to hear lawsuit on suicide crisis facing war veterans

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The Supreme Court of the United States last week denied a hearing on a lawsuit challenging the US Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) abuse of war veterans, who face a deepening mental health and suicide crisis. Eighteen veterans kill themselves each day, and the three branches of government have each answered with callous indifference.

At issue in *Veterans for Common Sense et al. v. Shinseki* was whether the judicial branch has the constitutional power to require congress to act to force the VA to effectively provide adequate treatment for victims of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD. By refusing to hear the case, the US government is denying recourse to the tens of thousands of veterans made suicidal by the imperialist wars that the US government regularly wages.

Veterans for Common Sense, the veterans' rights organization that filed the lawsuit, issued a statement in the wake of the Supreme Court's decision pointing to the economic context of the crisis facing war veterans.

"During our nation's worst economic disaster in 80 years," the statement reads, "more than 1.1 million Veterans still await VA disability claim decisions. Of those, 900,000 cases wait an average of nine months for a new or re-opened claim decision, plus an additional 250,000 cases wait four more years for an appealed claim decision. VA Inspector General reported in 2012 that VA makes errors in approximately 30 percent of VA's claim decisions. While our Veterans wait, they remain unable to pay their mortgage or rent, and face great challenges feeding their families."

These appalling figures serve as incriminating evidence of the government's complete lack of care for soldiers who bear the physical and mental weight of the ruling class' imperialist thirst for global domination.

This case has been subject to some disagreement

among layers of the ruling class. The suit was originally filed in 2007 and was granted reconsideration by an *en banc* sitting of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, which wrote in its ruling that the government was unconstitutionally depriving veterans of the health care and benefits "that our laws guarantee veterans upon completion of their service."

But with its refusal to hear the case, the Supreme Court has spoken for the more powerful layers of the ruling elite who are in agreement that all evidence of the devastating social impacts of war and austerity should be swept under the rug. As the Obama administration and Congress prepare an onslaught of cuts to the budgets of social services, the ruling class does not want to draw attention to the plight of veterans and the profound social misery that has resulted from the government's numerous wars of conquest.

The court's rejection of the suit could not come at a worse time for many veterans, who on top of facing the harrowing traumas of war are also forced to deal with the social ills of foreclosure, unemployment, and homelessness, to speak nothing of personal and family responsibilities.

Furthermore, the crisis is deepening as hundreds of thousands of Vietnam war veterans seek VA assistance for the first time as a result of the economic crisis. Veterans who previously could afford to pay for their own treatments are now filing requests for support as a result of long-term unemployment or wage and hour cuts.

Last year, the Obama administration and congress slashed the maximum length of unemployment benefits from 99 to 79 weeks. The Government Accountability Office reported that in 2010 and 2011 alone, over 5.5 million unemployed workers exhausted their benefits due to unavailability of employment.

The VA recently issued a report stating that 26,531 veterans were homeless in September 2012, nearly triple the total in 2010. The Department of Housing and Urban Development estimates that over 60,000 veterans are without a home on any given night. Veterans make up 23 percent of the total homeless population, despite the fact that they make up only 8 percent of the total population. Furthermore, Bureau of Labor Statistics data indicates that 30.2 percent of young veterans age 18 to 24 were unemployed in 2011.

Despite this overwhelming evidence of difficult conditions for veterans, some in the most reactionary sections of the ruling class have no pity for the nation's thousands of suicidal veterans. In January 2012, US Army Maj. General Dana Pittard exclaimed: "I have now come to the conclusion that suicide is an absolutely selfish act. ... I am personally fed up with soldiers who are choosing to take their own lives so that others can clean up their mess. Be an adult, act like an adult, and deal with your real-life problems like the rest of us."



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