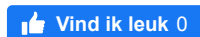




## New law to help vets with PTSD honors Marine who committed suicide



By [Jordan Gass-Pooré - Spring 2015](#) Feb 18, 2015



Susan Seske, Clay Hunt's mother, shares memories of her son at a reception Thursday at the Willard Hotel after she attended the signing of the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act into law at the White House. SHFWire photo by Jordan Gass- Pooré

WASHINGTON – As a child, Clay Hunt loved the outdoors. The Texas native knew every inch of his grandparents' ranch, where he fished and hunted year round.

Hunt, a decorated Marine Corps veteran and sniper, served tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. It was there he suffered physical injuries that healed and invisible wounds that stayed with him, President

Barack Obama said Thursday at the White House when he [signed](#) the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act.

On March 31, 2011, Hunt died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound at his apartment in Sugar Land, Texas. He was 28 years old. The new law, introduced by [Rep. Timothy J. Walz](#), D-Minn., honors his memory. Walz is an Army National Guard veteran.

“All I could think about was, ‘What would Clay say?’” Susan Selke, Hunt’s mother, said at a reception Thursday that followed the bill signing, which she attended with Clay’s stepfather, Richard Selke.



Robert A. McDonald, secretary of Veterans Affairs, celebrates the signing of the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act into law at a reception Thursday at the Willard Hotel. McDonald said the act will continue Hunt’s mission to help those with mental illness. SHFWire photo by Jordan Gass-Pooré

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Susan Selke said Hunt wouldn’t care if his name was attached to the law, only that his fellow veterans were taken care of.

“I also know he would say, ‘Mom, be brief and tell everyone to have a beer,’” she said.

Paul Rieckhoff, CEO and founder of [Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America](#), the advocacy group that sponsored the reception, said Selke has worked tirelessly to see this bill signed into law.

Rieckhoff remembered their initial meeting at a Houston barbeque joint when she told him that she was ready to get to work.

“The only thing tougher than a Marine is a Marine’s mom,” he said.

The new law will increase access to mental-health care and provide incentives to psychiatrists to work with military veterans. It passed by unanimous votes in the House and Senate.

Hunt was one of an estimated 22 military veterans who commit suicide each day, most 50 or older, according to a [study](#) published in 2013 by researchers with the [Department of Veterans Affairs](#).

When Hunt returned home from war in 2009, he continued to help others as a volunteer in Chile and Haiti after the 2010 earthquake with [Team Rubicon](#), a humanitarian aid organization founded by a fellow Marine.

Hunt helped fellow veterans deal with the psychological and physical wounds of war through appearances in television public service announcements that promoted mental health awareness.

He was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and, although he received treatment from the VA, he struggled to get disability payments after his paperwork was misplaced and didn’t receive the right disability rating until it was too late.

Although the law won’t bring Hunt back, the reforms are expected to help others who are going through similar challenges, Obama said.

“Clay has become immortal today,” Robert A. McDonald, VA secretary, said.

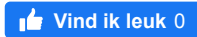
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### About Jordan Gass-Pooré - Spring 2015

Jordan Gass-Pooré is a Spring 2015 reporter for the SHFWire from Texas State University.



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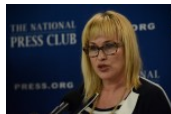
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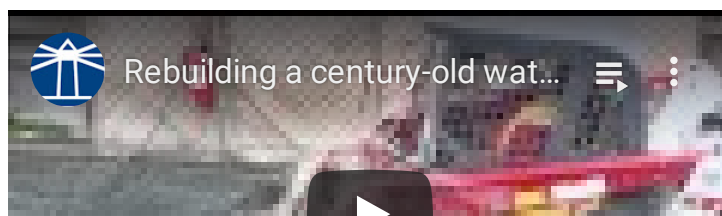


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